# MANHUNT

DETECTIVE STORY MONTHLY

"RENDEZVOUS" by

## James T. Farrell

Author of "STUDS LONIGAN"

Also —

HAL ELLSON
EVAN HUNTER
FRANK KANE
RICHARD DEMING
HAROLD Q. MASUR
— and others

EVERY STORY NEW!

FEBRUARY
35 CENTS

A Police File Novel by JONATHAN CRAIG

VOL. 3, NO. 2

# MANHUNT

FEBRUARY, 1955

*CONTENTS*

## COMPLETE NOVEL

CLASSIFICATION: HOMICIDE, A Police File Novel
*by Jonathan Craig* 97

## NOVELETTES

RENDEZVOUS *by James T. Farrell* ..... 64
RETURN ENGAGEMENT, A Johnny Liddell Novelette
*by Frank Kane* 25

## SHORT STORIES

THE PIGEONS *by Hal Ellson* ..... 47
HOT *by Evan Hunter* ..... 12
THE COMPETITORS *by Richard Deming* ..... 53
SELF-DEFENSE, A Scott Jordan Story *by Harold Q. Masur* ..... 81
THE REVOLVING DOOR *by Sam Merwin, Jr.* ..... 1

## FEATURES

*YOU*, DETECTIVE *by Wilson Harman* ..... 142
CRIME CAVALCADE *by Vincent H. Gaddis* ..... 78
PORTRAIT OF A KILLER *by Dan Sontup* ..... 94
WHAT'S YOUR VERDICT? *by Sam Ross* ..... 45
MUGGED AND PRINTED ..... 144

JOHN McCLOUD, *Editor* HAL WALKER, *Managing Editor*
CHAS. W. ADAMS, *Art Director* R. E. DECKER, *Business Manager*

MANHUNT VOLUME 3, NUMBER 2, February, 1955. Single copies 35 cents. Subscriptions, $4.00 for one year in the United States and Possessions; elsewhere $5.00 (in U. S. funds) for one year. Published monthly by Flying Eagle Publications, Inc. (an affiliate of the St. John Publishing Co.), 545 Fifth Avenue, New York 17, N. Y. Telephone MU 7-6623. Entered as Second Class matter at the Post Office, New York, N. Y. Additional entry at Concord, N. H. The entire contents of this issue are copyrighted 1955 by Flying Eagle Publications, Inc., under the International Copyright Convention. All rights reserved under Inter-American Copyright Convention. Title registered U. S. Pat. Office. Reproduction or use, without express permission, of editorial or pictorial content in any manner is prohibited. Postage must accompany manuscripts and drawings if return is desired, but no responsibility will be assumed for unsolicited materials. Manuscripts and art work should be sent to Manhunt, 545 Fifth Avenue, New York 17, N. Y. No similarity between any of the names, characters, persons and/or institutions appearing in this magazine and those of any living or dead person or institution is intended and any similarity which may exist is purely coincidental. Printed in the U. S. A.

*He just kept thinking about it. It would be so nice to walk right out of the hotel and be free . . . even if he got killed for it . . .*

# The Revolving Door

**BY SAM MERWIN, JR.**

MARTY looked up from the cards as the maid came out of the bedroom with the used sheets rolled up in her arms. His dark regard caught her pale blue eyes and held them. She paused politely, waiting for him to speak, while he flipped through the file of his thoughts, searching desperately for something to say. Finally, as she made some small movement, he managed it.

"What's your name?"

"Ellen, sir." They were the first words she had spoken to him in the nine days he had been there, save for the routine, "Do you mind if I come in, sir?"

He wasn't used to being called "sir." It threw him off stride. But then, he wasn't used to wanting to talk to a woman like this. He wasn't used to living in a hotel like this. He wasn't used to being alone.

He said, "You're a good girl, Ellen." The words sounded ridiculous in his inner ears.

But she merely nodded and said, "Thank you, sir. It's a lovely day out, sir." Then she went on her way to the linen closet in the hall beyond, leaving the door open behind her.

Marty told himself she hadn't meant anything by it. Or had she? She couldn't have. No one knew he was staying here in this hotel, not even Ryan. The maid came back, carrying towels — the pale yellow towels of the hotel. As she disappeared through the bedroom door, on her way to the bathroom beyond, he wondered how many of those elegant towels were stolen by guests every year. This place, he thought, was so elegant probably not even the guests would steal.

This elegance was a vital factor in Marty's plan. He had worked the whole scheme out almost a year before, when it became evident that he was losing control of the rackets, that Big Nick was muscling his way up to the top. Marty never kidded himself — that was one of the keys to his survival. Ten years ago, even five, he'd have squashed Big Nick and his boys like so many mosquitoes.

But running the rackets was like being a big league ball player — you had just so many base hits, just so many catches, in you. Then it was time to quit, before the game caught up with you. It was quitting time for Marty.

He'd figured the whole thing out. Convert capital into cash — then take a walk and disappear. He had the cash, five neat envelopes, each containing a crisp package of a hundred thousand-dollar bills. They were in a neat alligator-skin briefcase, locked securely in the hotel safe. If need be, he could discard the briefcase and stash the envelopes in his pockets — but they'd ruin the cut of his suit.

The case was his sole piece of luggage when he'd walked into the hotel. He had bought a couple of big suitcases since — by telephone. Suitcases and shirts and ties and underwear and pajamas, all neatly monogrammed with the initials GS. George Smithers — he liked the Smithers touch instead of Smith. It was smart, where Smith would have been stupid. Just as coming to this hotel was smart.

They wouldn't come after him here. To raise a ruckus in this haven for the very rich, the very important, would be to invite the sky to fall in on them. Even if they knew he was there — which they didn't. They wouldn't touch him here.

The one factor he hadn't figured was that it would take so long for Ryan to arrange transport out of the

country. Six days ago, when Marty called him, Ryan had said it would take another week. One more day to go. Ryan thought he was using the name of Gregory Somers — that would be the name on the passport the lawyer was getting for him. And when he registered as George Smithers, Marty had told the desk-clerk he wished to remain incognito during his stay. Those were his words — "I wish to remain incognito." Marty smiled to himself as he looked at the cards on the table in front of him. A Yale professor couldn't have said them better.

The king of clubs was hopelessly buried. Marty thought of cheating himself at solitaire, then gathered the cards with a swift, deft gesture and shuffled them for another try. The maid — Ellen — came out and paused by the door and said, "Is there anything else, sir?"

He said, wishing she'd call him Mr. Smithers, George, anything but that goddam "sir." "I guess not. You can leave the door open, though."

He looked after her, wondering why nothing was ever the way it was in the movies. In a place like this, he'd expected the maids would be all dolled up in short black dresses with frilly aprons and caps, like the pants on lamb chops in fancy restaurants. Not in simple, pale green frocks that melted into the walls. And Ellen was no chick. She was well into her placid thirties and broad across the beam. Still, he thought, staring after her, not a bad pair of hips. Not fancy, maybe, but practical. *A broad that is a broad*, he thought.

Whoa — he was getting island happy. And women were not, had never been, his weakness. But nine days — and nine nights — without a single drink was a hell of a long time for a man like Marty. If you didn't smoke or play the chicks, there had to be some compensation. For more than twenty years, alcohol had been Marty's. The very best of alcohol, in the very best mixture, taken slowly, steadily, never enough to addle his wits but enough to keep his nerves from snapping like used-up rubber bands under the never-easing tension of his work.

But lately, as his confidence crumbled under the assault of Big Nick and his musclemen, it had been getting him. And now, when he wanted one of those special drinks only Louis, his houseman, knew how to make — a julep, of special, uncommercial Kentucky bourbon, spiced with crushed mint and topped by an armagnac float, he couldn't afford to. He couldn't trust Louis any more than he could trust any of the others. Not with Big Nick making the power play he'd been making lately. He couldn't trust anybody, not even Ryan — though he had enough on that slick shyster to keep him in line until he was safely out of the country.

And there were a lot of places in the world where Gregory Somers,

American, could settle down and live like an emperor on five hundred grand. Five hundred gees would buy a lot of juleps — with armagnac floats. As a kid, he'd resented his alien parentage, the accent he'd had to work so hard to get out of his voice. But now he was grateful. His Spanish and Italian might be gutter-glib — but with them, he could get by anywhere except maybe in Russia. And who wanted to go to Russia except a lot of crazy Commies?

The door of the room across the hall was open and Marty could hear faint strains of hot jazz coming his way. Illinois Jacquet on tenor sax — that kind of music was something he knew about. Hearing it now, in these surroundings, it gave him a lift and made him a little sad, all at once. It reminded him of all the good times, all the good places, all the good music, all the chicks he was kissing good-by. To hear it better, he got up and strolled to the door and stood there, listening.

The husky kid had moved in across the hall three days earlier. Marty had seen him, passed him in the hall, maybe a half dozen times. A great tall kid, maybe six-three, with shoulders like a football player. A crew-cut kid with a slightly busted nose and an otherwise round, healthy, untroubled face. An unpressed-tweed and flannels kid, an Ivy League kid who would never have to work a day in his life if he didn't want to. The kind of a kid who belonged in a place like this. Marty wondered what a kid like that thought about, how he felt. He wondered if Ellen called him "sir," or "Mr. Wiggensworth," or whatever his name was.

Marty had never before thought of kids like that, or of the perfectly brushed, fur-bearing girls who went with them as human. They were out of the race, above it. They didn't know the score — hell, they didn't have to.

The big kid appeared in the doorway and looked mildly surprised to see Marty standing across the hall, listening. God, but he was big. He had taken off his tweed jacket and his plain white shirt looked ready to split apart if he took a deep breath. For a moment, out of long habit, Marty measured him, wondering how he would go in the ring. With the right handling, the right build-up, maybe. They needed heavyweights like crazy now. But he was crazy even to think about it. Why should a kid like that want to fight?

Marty said, "You got any Dixieland?"

The big kid looked down at Marty. He seemed to be seeing him for the first time and not liking what he saw. He said nothing, just firmly and quietly closed the door.

Marty discovered his jaw was hanging open. He shut it and went back inside and closed his own door behind him carefully, resisting an impulse to slam it. He felt as if someone had stuffed ice-cubes into

his stomach. The fresh young punk! All Marty had wanted was someone to talk to. He wouldn't have dreamed of speaking to the kid at all if there'd been anyone else around.

That was it, he thought furiously — that was the invisible barrier that couldn't be crossed. They called it a free country, a democratic country — what a laugh! Money wouldn't do it — they laughed at money because they had it, or their fathers had it, or their uncles, or somebody. They thought they owned the world when they didn't even know what was happening in it or how real people felt.

For five lousy bucks, Marty thought, he'd have that kid worked over. The kid probably thought football was a rough game . . .

He stayed mad for almost an hour, keeping himself mad for something to do. But then it faded and the loneliness crept back in. Nine lousy days in this lousy hotel and no one to talk to, nothing to do. He had tried reading — but he had never been much good at reading anything but a comic book or a balance sheet. And who could read anyway, with the thought of Big Nick being after him always in back of his thoughts? He couldn't concentrate, except on his own survival.

He looked at the phone, pushed over to the edge of the table to make room for his solitaire. He wished the damned thing would ring. He was used to lots of phones, all of them ringing, all of them bringing reports on provinces of the empire he had built up and run for so long. But if the phone rang now . . .

He got up and walked to the bathroom — fancy, black tile and mirror. Back through the bedroom — comfortable, discreet, polite, not even a pinup, just a lousy modern copy of a lousy modern painting with trees that looked like houses, and houses that looked like faces, and faces that looked like pinball machines. He'd have settled for a couple of cows and a Swiss châlet — anything, as long as it looked like what it was supposed to.

He went back to the living room, all pale green and grey. Why not a few splashes of the warm, bright colors his Mediterranean soul longed for? Probably the guy that decorated the joint considered bright colors vulgar. He'd like to get hold of the creep and turn him loose with some of the boys. They had special treatments for guys like that and why not? Weren't the guys against nature?

His heart twisted violently as he saw a piece of white paper slid halfway under the door. For a moment, he stalked it warily, like a dog scenting out something he does not understand but knows instinctively is hostile. If Big Nick or his boys had run him to earth here . . . With a quick, darting, sidling gesture, he picked it up.

It was merely the room-service luncheon menu.

Marty scanned it, scowling, humiliated at having been afraid. *Hors d'oeuvres variés, paté maison, petite marmite Henri Quatre, consommé double, vichysoisse, truite frais meunière, tête d'agneau vinaigrette . . .* Why the hell hadn't his parents been French?

And whatever he ordered would be some prettied-up, tasteless guck. He thought longingly, as he had thought thousands of times over the years, of the hot, strong, redolent dishes his mother had cooked in the old railroad flat in the tenement — the scalloppini, the risottos, the thick minestrones, the spaghetti. How he had put them away! He looked down at his lean belly, flat against the dark-brown waistband of his trousers. He had never had to worry about diet — but now he wasn't hungry, and he wondered if only the food was at fault. His whole being craved alcohol — but how could he afford to drink under the circumstances?

He called room service and ordered a half-broiled chicken, in English, and coffee and ice cream. At least he knew what he'd be getting. But his appetite was causing him to envision baked lasagna and pasta fazoole.

He wondered why he let Big Nick coop him up here, like some sort of animal in a plush cage. All he had to do was take the elevator downstairs, get his briefcase out of the safe and walk through the revolving door and the world was his. He reminded himself to stop kidding. They might not know Marty's dark, undistinguished, blue-chinned face in the hotel — but he wouldn't go two blocks without being recognized. And then he wouldn't merely be a voluntary prisoner in comfortable sanctuary — he'd be the proverbial hunted animal, with no chance of escape.

If he could only walk through that revolving door — but he couldn't, not till Ryan had completed arrangements for his escape from the country.

The food came and the waiter was new to him. He watched the blond, nondescript little man in a white jacket as he served and cut the chicken — they did everything for you in a place like this — and set up a table. The waiter was nervous; he shook so he banged a plate on the table three times, putting it down. Marty's heart took another twist and his fingers itched to grab the man by his jacket front and shove him against the wall and bat some sense out of him.

But then he noted the man's nicotine-stained fingers and dull, bloodshot eyes. He said, "Rough one last night, fellow?"

The man blinked at him, shuffled apologetically and said, "A little, sir. I'm not supposed to be on today, but Fred took sick and they called me in."

In his relief, Marty tipped him five bucks. A harmless, hungover rabbit of a guy. Yet Marty envied

the jerk his hangover. At least he'd had to drink to get it. Since he wasn't hungry, he forced himself to eat, chewing each mouthful carefully. When he was through, he put the plates back on the wagon himself and pushed the wagon out into the hall. The door across the way was open again, and strains of hot music still emanated from inside — this time it sounded like a Buck Clayton trumpet chorus to Marty's seasoned ear. He heard a girl's soft laughter followed by, "You know, Binny, you're cute." Then, maddeningly, he heard the unmistakable clink of ice against glass.

*Binny!* What a name for a guy, and a monster guy like his neighbor. *The big, thick-headed punk!* he thought in an excess of fury and envy. He stood there a moment, just hating, then went slowly back inside. His hands were shaking, just like that goop waiter's. Marty thrust them in his pants pockets.

He turned on the television set they'd sent up the second day and tried to get the ball game. But the home team was out of town — how had he managed to forget that? — and all he could get were homemaking programs and old movies. He tried to lose himself in an ancient gangster picture, but its devices and dramatics were too unbelievable to hold his interest. He must have walked five miles of carpet before it began to get dark. *I'm getting just like stir-crazy,* he told himself.

He toyed with the idea of using the cover of darkness to go downstairs, get his dough and slip out through that damned revolving door. Once he was in the clear, he could drink like a lord. Not long ago, he'd have made the break — and he'd have gotten away with it too, but now it would be a lunatic move. He'd softened up — not much, just a little, like a great infielder just over the hill and half a step slow. But it was enough, too much. He'd been giving orders too long instead of executing them. Hell, he didn't even have a gun with him.

He hadn't carried a gun in years.

But the darkness was heartening. It meant his self-inflicted term of confinement was drawing to its close. He listened to a news program on television, but it had nothing of interest to him. He thought about Louis, about those thousands of wonderful juleps he'd mixed over the years. Thought about them until they merged into a single tall, frost glass with a sprig of green mint peeping out over its ice-rimmed top. Hell, he could even smell the blend of mint, bourbon and rare armagnac that held out its delightful promise of relief from tension. He thought about the big punk across the hall — Binny, that was a laugh! — having drinks with a girl in his room and no worries about Big Nick on his stupid, Ivy League brain. Marty ran a suddenly dry tongue across the roof of his mouth.

Hell, it was his last night — Ryan

had said a week, and the week would be up tomorrow morning. He thought of calling Ryan and giving him a nudge. But it didn't pay to look anxious — not with a sharp character like Ryan. Marty picked up the phone instead and called for bar service.

After all, he was human, wasn't he? And this was his last night. He hadn't believed he could ever crave a drink so badly. His whole being was starved for one.

It took half an hour — Louis had used to make them ahead of time and store them in the refrigerator. Putting a julep together properly took time and trouble. And it was ten to one — no, a hundred to one — the room service bartender wouldn't do the job properly.

When the same watery-eyed waiter who had brought his lunch came in with it on a tray, Marty eyed it like a cat inspecting a new kind of food in its dish. Then, slowly, he lifted it from the tray and inhaled its fragrance. So far, so good. His hand was steady as the proverbial rock when at last he lifted it to his lips . . .

Halleluja, it was good! He told himself, as the mellow fluid floated down his gullet, that it wasn't really as good as the ones Louis mixed, that it only seemed so because he hadn't tasted any liquor at all for so long. He took a long pull at it, then lowered the tall pewter tumbler and said to the waiter, who was still standing by, "Tell your barman to make three more — and bring them up at half-hour intervals."

When the man had gone, Marty sat down on the sofa and looked at the drink on the table in front of him, and felt the good whiskey and brandy flow through him like liquid gold and lived — just lived.

When he had finished the fourth julep, Marty debated with himself about ordering four more. But his wits were still with him, and he knew he'd had all he could afford to take if he was going to be sharp on the morrow. Hell, he was going to have to be sharp on the morrow. He got up just a shade unsteadily and moved sedately toward the bedroom, turning the lights off carefully behind him. He hung up his clothes carefully and dropped, naked, into bed, where he fell almost immediately into the first sound sleep he had enjoyed in more than a week. The first two nights in the hotel, he had slept well, but since then it had been purgatory.

When he woke up, suddenly, he was clammy with sweat. Nightmare, he thought, and tried to put the pieces of it together. But it wasn't nightmare, it was something far worse. He'd made a slip, a bad slip.

*And they knew where he was!*

It was cat and mouse, and he was the mouse. He had played this game himself much too long not to recognize what was going on. How he had ever missed it in the first place he couldn't imagine. Tricked by his own stupid weakness for drink!

The aftertaste was the tipoff. It was faintly sharp but not unpleasant, like the usual aftertaste of whiskey — a taste he knew all too well. It was the aftertaste of his own private whiskey, the special private stock, laid down more than forty years ago by some Kentucky colonel. Marty had bought the whole supply for himself when the estate went on the block more than a decade ago. It had a distinct individual quality, imparted by a combination of local springwater and non-commercial distillation.

It was his own brand of julep — or rather Louis' — and as part of the game they had mixed it for him. He recognized all too well the brand of humor behind the game. Big Nick had even taken over Marty's own kind of joke!

Panic rode him like a witch on a broomstick. He fumbled his way out of bed, turned on the lights and began to walk some more. He was shivering in his sweaty nakedness and, outside, the grey of dawn was bringing renewed life to the office building across the street. He couldn't plan coherently. All he could think of was that Big Nick knew where he was and was waiting for him.

He reached for the phone on the living room table and gave Ryan's private home number to a sleepy-voiced switchboard operator. He stood there, still shivering, while it rang twice, three times, four times, five, six, seven, eight, nine, ten, eleven times without an answer.

Then he saw the white triangle under the hall door. He went over and picked it up, not warily but resignedly. Then he switched on the lights and looked at it. It was a letter, in an envelope, with the name George Smithers scrawled on it in a semi-literate, too-familiar hand. Violet ink and verbena — Louis even had his suite number under his name. He tore open the envelope, unfolded the letter inside and read —

*George —*

*We'll try and do as well for you tonight. We don't want you to go thirsty.*

*As ever, you louse,*

*L.*

Maybe he shouldn't have slapped Louis that last time. But Louis' too-silent perfection had gotten on his nerves at a time when they were stretched singing taut. And that "*we*" he used — it meant Louis and someone else, of course. Louis and who? Big Nick, of course. It was like that phoney to grab his houseman as well as his business. The creep had never had an original thought or idea in his life.

And where was Ryan? Marty tried him again, and again, kept trying every fifteen minutes, as the dawn became morning outside. For something to do, he bathed and shaved and got dressed, just as if it mattered any more.

It looked as if he were going to have to wait and get the lawyer at his office. What a time for Ryan to

be out on the town, or wherever he was!

Between calls, he stood in the window and studied the blank face of the office building across the street. He wondered which one of those hundreds of sheets of glass covered the stake-out from which they had been watching him. Once, in his cold fear and fury, he almost raised his fist and shook it at the building, in a gesture of desperate defiance. But that would simply tell them their little game of cat and mouse was working on him.

At nine-fifteen, he called Ryan's office. The lawyer wouldn't be in yet, but his secretary would, and she'd know when he was coming in. What was her name? Miss Nourse — a plump, homely, efficient girl who knew when to keep her trap shut. As Ryan's secretary, she had to.

"I'm so sorry, Mr. Somers," she said, "Didn't Mr. Ryan get in touch with you? He said he was going to before his plane left yesterday."

"Before — his — plane — left?" Marty heard himself repeating Miss Nourse's bland phrase like an idiot. "Where'd he go?"

"He's been so overworked," she said, as if Marty were just any client. "The doctors told him he needed a rest. He took off for Honolulu yesterday afternoon. I saw him off from the airport."

"Did he leave anything for me?" Marty asked eagerly — too eagerly.

"Oh — I think I know what you mean," was the reply. "He did say something about a hitch developing at the last moment. I'm dreadfully sorry."

Just like that — she was sorry and he was a dead man. There was a click and the line went dead, too. Hell, everything was going dead.

But with hope gone, Marty went into action. There was no sense in staying cooped up, like a beast in a cave. Sooner or later, when they got tired of waiting for him to come out, they'd come in and get him. They'd buy the hotel if they had to — and they had the resources to do it.

But they wouldn't be expecting him to leave right away. They'd be figuring on having a little more fun with him first. He knew how their minds worked — knew much too well. A rear entrance? No, they'd be having them watched in any case. It was going to have to be smack through the big revolving door.

And then what? The first half minute was going to be the crucial period. If Marty could survive that long, if he was lucky enough to get a good cab driver who could shake the pursuit in traffic, he could make a little private airfield on the outskirts — not the big airport, they'd have that cased, too. If his luck didn't run out, he could make Canada. And Big Nick couldn't operate so well north of the border. And you could get a passport forged in Canada as easily as here.

A slim chance? Yes, but better than waiting for the slaughter. Within himself, for the first time in longer than he could remember, Marty felt the rise of excitement — not fear, but the old overwhelming eagerness to meet a challenge, to whip it, to walk away the winner. In this case, of course, the only prize in sight was his survival. But that and the money in the hotel safe were all he had wanted all along.

Marty took a deep breath before he opened the door. Automatically, his fingers rose to straighten his tie. He wasn't taking the luggage — it was much too risky. And he could pick up a new wardrobe once he was safe again. As his hand came down, quite involuntarily, he crossed himself. Then he opened the door and walked out.

The hall was empty. The door of the big punk's room across the way was ajar and the maid's key was in it. Marty thought of giving Ellen a tip, then decided against it. After all, what had she done for him. For all he knew, she might have been the one who put the finger on him.

In the elevator, he even swapped remarks with the pilot about the ball team and its chances for the pennant. But he was thinking, enviously, of the big punk with all the hot records and the soft-voiced girlfriend. Considering what lay ahead of himself, and the soft path ahead of the big punk, he wondered why things weren't arranged more fairly. *Stop being a cry-baby*, he thought.

The day desk-clerk greeted him pleasantly and took Marty's receipt for theal ligator-skin briefcase.

As he reached the revolving door, he stopped his mental wandering, took another deep breath. This was going to be it, this next thirty seconds, give or take a few. He was either alive or dead. And, as he pushed boldly through, he felt an inward, singing assurance that he was going to win — and live.

The doorman in his light blue and gold uniform gestured toward a cab. There was nothing wrong with the early morning traffic picture, not a person or a car out of place. The cab pulled up and the doorman opened the door. Marty stepped inside and said, "McMasters Airfield."

"Sorry," said another voice almost in his ear. "We've got an errand in town first."

As the cab door shut, Marty looked slowly around. The big punk from across the hall, the one with the funny name — Binny — was sitting there, almost filling the back of the cab, grinning at him like an overgrown, friendly pup.

He held the big automatic as if he'd been born with one in his hand.

For a flickering instant, Marty wondered who had betrayed him — Ryan, Louis, Ellen, one of the waiters, the desk clerk? Or perhaps more than one of them. But, looking into unsmiling steel-grey eyes in that boyish, smiling face, he knew he was never going to find out. There wasn't going to be time.

# Hot

I WORE moccasins, which were against Navy regulations, and the heat of the deck plates scorched up through the thin soles of the shoes, blistering my feet. I sat aft on the fantail, looking out over the heat of Guantanamo Bay, watching the guys from one of the other ships diving over the side and into the water. The water looked cool and clear, and the guys from the other can seemed to be enjoying it. They didn't seem to be afraid of any barracuda. They seemed to be

*Everybody kept telling him to kill the skipper. After a while, it began to look like a good idea.*

**BY EVAN HUNTER**

ordinary guys taking an ordinary swim in the drink.

The Cuban sun beat down on my head, scorched through the white cap there, left a soggy ring of sweat where the hat band met my forehead. The old man made sure we wore hats, and he posted a notice on the quarterdeck saying no man would be allowed to roam the ship without a shirt on. He was worried about us getting sunburned. He was worried about all that sun up there beating down and turning us lobster red.

But he wouldn't let us swim.

He said there were barracuda in the water. He knew. He was a big-shot Commander who'd politicked his way through Annapolis, and he knew. Sure. He couldn't tell a barracuda from a goldfish, but he'd pursed his fat lips and scratched his bald head and said, "No swimming. Barracuda." And that was that.

Except every other ship in the squadron was allowing its crew to swim. Every other ship admitted there were no barracuda in the waters, or maybe there were, but who the hell cared? They were all out there swimming, jumping over the sides and sticking close to the nets the ships had thrown over, and nobody'd got bitten yet.

I wiped the sweat from my forehead, and I sucked in a deep breath, trying to get some air, trying to sponge something fresh out of the hot stillness all around me. I sucked in garbage fumes and that was all. The garbage cans were stacked on the fantail like rotting corpses. We weren't supposed to dump garbage in port, and the garbage scow was late, but did the old man do anything about that? No, he just issued stupid goddamn orders about no swimming, orders he . . .

"Resting, Peters?"

I jumped to my feet because I recognized the voice. I snapped to and looked into the skipper's face and said, "Yes, sir, for just a moment, sir."

"Haven't you got a work station?" he asked. I looked at his fat lips, pursed now, cracking and dried from the heat. I looked at his pale blue eyes and the deep brown color of his skin, burned from the sun and the wind on the open bridge. My captain, my skipper. The Commander. The louse.

"Yes, sir," I said. "I have a work station."

"Where, Peters?"

"The radar shack, sir."

"Then what are you doing on the fantail?"

"It was hot up there, sir. I came down for a drink at the scuttlebutt, and I thought I'd catch some air while I was at it."

"Uh-huh." He nodded his head, the braided peak of his cap catching the hot rays of the sun. The silver maple leaf on the collar of his shirt winked up like a hot eye. He looked down at the deck, and then he looked at my feet, and then he said,

"Are those regulation shoes, Peters?"

"No, sir," I said.

"Why not?"

"My feet were sweating in . . ."

"Are you aware of my order about wearing loafers and moccasins aboard ship?"

"Yes, sir."

"Then why are you wearing moccasins?"

"I told you, sir. My feet . . ."

"Why are you wearing white socks, Peters?"

"Sir?"

"You heard me, goddammit. Regulation is black socks. The uniform of the day is posted every day in the midships passageway, Peters. The uniform for today is dungarees, white caps, black socks and black shoes. Are you aware of that?"

"Yes, sir."

"Do you know that we are here on shakedown cruise, Peters?"

"Yes, sir."

"Do you know that the squadron commander may pop in on this ship at any moment? Do you know that? What do you think he'd say to me if he found men in white socks and moccasins? What the hell do you think this is, Peters? A goddamn country club?"

"No, sir."

"When's the last time you had a haircut, Peters?"

"Last week, sir."

"Don't lie to me, Peters."

"Last week, sir," I repeated.

"Then get down to the barber shop after sweepdown, do you understand? And you'd better shave, too, Peters. I don't like any man in my crew looking like a bum."

"I'm sorry, sir. I . . ."

"Get back to your station. And if I find you goofing off again, Peters, it's going to be your hide, remember that. Now get going."

"Yes, sir," I said.

"Change those socks and shoes first."

"Yes, sir."

"And on the double, Peters."

"Yes, sir."

I left him and went down to the aft sleeping compartment. It was hotter down there, and you could feel the sweat clinging to the sides of the ship, dripping from the bulkheads. There was a stink down there, too, a stink worse than garbage, the stink of men living in cramped quarters. I went to my locker and lifted the top, and Ramsey, a radioman second, looked down from his sack. He was in his scivvies, and his bare chest and legs were coated with perspiration.

"Man," he said," and I thought it was hot in Georgia."

"The old man is prowling," I told him. "You better move your backside."

"Let him prowl," Ramsey said. "That one don't scare me none."

"No, huh?" I said. I took out a pair of black socks and the regulation black shoes, and then I kicked off the moccasins and pulled off the white socks. "Maybe you like losing liberty, huh, Ramsey? If the old

man catches you sprawled out like that, you'll get a Captain's Mast, at least."

"You know what he can do with his Mast, don't you?" Ramsey asked, smiling and stretching out.

"How come you're so brave, Ramsey?" I asked, putting on the black socks.

"How come? I let you in on a secret, Dave. You really want to know?"

"Yeah, how come?"

"I'm sick, man. I got me cat fever. The Chief Pharmacist's Mate himself, he said I got to lay flat on my keester. That's what he said. So let the old man come down here and say something, just let him. I'll tell him just where the crowbar goes."

"You wouldn't tell him nothing," I said, smiling. "You and the skipper are buddies."

"Sure," Ramsey said.

"I think you really like the old man."

"Only one way I'd like him," Ramsey said.

"How's that?"

Ramsey rolled over. "Dead," he said.

I went up to the radar shack after changing, and I got to work, piddling around with a bucket and a rag, wiping off the radar scopes, fooling with the plotting boards, making like I was working. The radar shack was about as big as a flea's nose, and I'd already cleaned it thoroughly after chow. That made no difference to the Navy. In the Navy, you cleaned it again, or you pretended to clean it again. Anything to keep you busy. Anything to keep you from enjoying a swim when the thermometer was ready to pop.

Gary came in while I was behind the vertical plotting board, and he said, "What're you doing, Peters?"

"What the hell does it look like I'm doing?" I asked him.

"It looks like you're working," he said, "but I know that can't be so."

"Yeah, stow it," I told him.

"You shouldn't be nasty to non-commissioned officers, Peters," he said. He smiled a crooked smile, and his buck teeth showed in his narrow face. "I could report you to the old man, you know."

"You would, too," I said.

"He don't like you to begin with." Gary smiled again, enjoying the three stripes he wore on his dress blues, enjoying the three stripes he'd inked onto his denim shirt. "What'd you do to the old boy, Dave?"

"Nothing," I said.

"Well, he sure don't like you."

"The feelings are mutual," I said.

"You like mid watches, Dave?"

"Whattya mean?" I asked.

"We got to stand voice radio watch in port, you know that. Not enough radiomen. I showed the old man the watch list. Had you slated for a four to eight this afternoon."

"So?"

"The old man told me to put you on the mid watch."

"The mid watch? What the hell for? Why . . ."

"Nobody likes to drag up here at midnight, Dave," Gary said. "But don't be bitter."

"What the hell did he do that for?" I asked.

Gary shook his head. "He just don't like you, chum. Hell, he don't like any enlisted man on this ship — but you he likes least of all."

"The hell with him," I said. "I've stood mid watches before. Ain't no mid watch going to break me."

"That's the spirit," Gary said drily. He paused a moment, and then said, "But you know something, Dave?"

"What?"

"If I had a character like the old man riding my tail, you know what I'd do?"

"No. What would you do?"

"I'd kill him," he said softly. He looked at me steadily, and then turned. "Don't want to interrupt your work, chum," he said, and then he was gone.

I thought about that mid watch all morning and, when the chow whistle sounded, I dropped the bucket and rags and headed down for the main deck. I got in line and started talking with one of the guys, Crawley, a gunner's mate. I had my back to the railing so I naturally couldn't see what was going on behind me. Nobody yelled, "Attention!" either, so I didn't know what was happening until I heard the old man's voice say, "How about it, Peters?"

I turned slowly, and he was standing there with his hands on his hips and a smile on his face, but the smile didn't reach those cold blue eyes of his.

"Sir?" I said.

"You know what this leaf on my collar means, Peters?"

"Yes, sir," I said. I was standing at attention now, and the sweat was streaming down my face, and my feet were sweating inside the black socks and black shoes.

"Do you know that an enlisted man is supposed to come to attention when an officer appears? Do you know that I am the captain of this ship, Peters?"

"Yes, sir. I know that."

"I don't think I like the tone of your voice, Peters."

"I'm sorry, sir."

"Hereafter, Peters, you keep your eyes peeled, understand? And whenever you see me coming, I want you to shout, 'Attention!' in case there are any other members of the crew who don't understand the meaning of respect. Do you understand that, Peters?"

"Yes, sir."

"Good. And so you won't forget it, Peters, perhaps we'll forego liberty for a week when we get back to the States."

"Sir, I . . ."

"That'll do, Peters. I'll discuss this with the Communications Officer, and you'll be restricted to the ship for a week after we return to Norfolk."

"I didn't even see you, sir," I said doggedly. "My back was . . ."

"It's your business to see me, Peters. And from now on, you'd damn well better see me."

"You're the boss," I said angrily.

"Yes, Peters," the captain said coldly. "I am." He looked at me steadily for another moment, and then addressed the other guys standing in line. "At ease," he said, and he walked through the passageway near the mess hall and went into the washroom.

I watched his back disappear, and then I slouched against the bulkhead, and Crawley, the gunner's mate, said, "That rotten louse."

I didn't answer him. I was thinking of the mid watch, and now the loss of a week's liberty, after three weeks of shakedown cruise when we'd all been restricted to the base. The swabbies on the base all got liberty in Havana, but not the poor slobs who came down to play war games, not us. We roamed the base and bought souvenirs for the folks at home, but you can buy only so many souvenirs in three weeks, and after that you don't even bother going ashore. Sure, Norfolk was a rat town, but it was a town at least, and there were women there — if you weren't too particular — and Stateside liberty ain't to be sneezed at, not after three weeks in Guantanamo.

And tomorrow we'd be going out with the cruiser again, and that meant a full day of Battle Stations, the phony General Quarters stuff that was supposed to knit us together into a fighting crew. I didn't mind that business because it wasn't too bad, but after a mid watch — even if you went to sleep right after evening chow, which you never did — it was a back breaker. You got off at four in the morning, provided your relief wasn't goofing, and you hit the sack until reveille. If you averaged two hours sleep, you were good. And then Battle Stations all day.

"He rides everybody," Crawley said. "Everybody. He's crazy, that's all."

"Yeah," I said.

"I come off a DE," Crawley said. "We hit more Pacific islands than I can count. This was in the last war, Peters."

"Yeah," I said dully.

"We had a guy like this one, too. So we were coming in on Tarawa the night of the invasion, and three quartermasters got ahold of him, right on the bridge, right in front of the exec and a pile of other officers. They told that boy that he better shape up damn soon or he was gonna be swimmin' with the sharks. He looked to the exec and the other brass for help, but they didn't budge an inch. Boy, he read the deep-six in everybody's eyes."

"What'd he do?" I asked.

"He gave the conn to the exec, right then and there, and we were never bothered by him again. He transferred off the ship inside a month."

"He must've come onto this tub," I said.

"No, he couldn't hold a candle to our old man. Our old man is the worst I ever met in the Navy, and that includes boot camp. He's a guy who really deserves it."

"Deserves what?" I asked.

"A hole between the eyes maybe. Or some arsenic in his goddamned commanding officer's soup. Or a dunk in the drink with his damn barracuda."

"You land in Portsmouth for that," I said.

"Not if they don't catch you, Peters," Crawley said.

"Fat chance of getting away with it," I said.

"You think they'd know who did it?" he asked. "Suppose the old man gets a hole in his head from a .45 swiped from the gun locker? Suppose . . ."

"You better knock that kind of talk off," I warned. "That's mutiny, pal."

"Mutiny, my foot. Suppose the .45 were dumped over the side? How would they prove who did it? You know how many guys are on this ship, Peters?"

"Yeah," I said slowly.

"You wait and see," he said. "Someday, somebody'll have the guts to do it. Goodbye, old man. And good riddance."

"Yeah, but suppose . . ."

"The line's moving, Peters," Crawley said.

The base sent out a drone that afternoon, and we went out and shot at it. We didn't get back to the bay until about 1930, and then we had a late chow, and the old man announced that no movies would be shown on the boat deck that night because we'd missed the launch that brought the reels around. Findlay, the Chief Bos'n, asked him if we couldn't see the same movie we'd seen the night before, but he said, "I don't like seeing movies twice," and that was the end of it.

I suppose I should have gone straight to bed because the mid watch was coming up, but instead I hung around abovedecks, trying to get some air. Guys had dumped their mattresses all over the ship, sleeping up there under the stars in their scivvies. There was no breeze, and it was hot as hell, and I'd already taken more salt pills than I should have. The sweat kept coming, that kind of sweat that stuck all your clothes to you and made you want to crawl out of your skin. A poker game was in session near the torpedo tubes amidships on the boatdeck, and I watched it for a while, and then climbed the ladder down to the main deck.

Mr. Gannson was OD, and he slouched against the metal counter

and threw the bull with Ferguson, the gunner's mate who was on with him as messenger. They both wore .45's strapped to their hips, and I passed them silently, nodding as I went by. I leaned over the rail just aft of the quarterdeck, looking down at the fluorescent sprinkles of water that lapped the sides of the ship. The water looked cool, and it made me feel more uncomfortable. I fired a cigarette and looked out to the lights of the base, and then I heard Mr. Gannson say, "You got a clip in that gun, Ferguson?"

I turned as Ferguson looked up with a puzzled look on his face. "Why, no, sir. You remember the ditty bag thing. We . . ."

"This is shakedown, Ferguson. The captain catch you with an empty sidearm, and you're up the creek."

"But the ditty bag . . ."

"Never mind that. Get to the gun locker and load up."

"Yes, sir," Ferguson said.

The ditty bag he'd referred to had been hanging from one of the stanchions in the forward sleeping compartment. Davis, on fire watch, had gone down to relieve Pietro. The fire watch is just a guy who roams the ship, looking for fires and crap games and making sure all the lights are out in the sleeping compartments after taps. I don't know why he rates a .45 on his hip, but he does. When you relieve the watch, you're supposed to check the weapon he gives you, make sure it's loaded, and all that bull. So Pietro handed Davis the gun, and Davis probably wasn't too used to .45's because he'd just made radarman third, and only non-commissioned officers stood fire watch on our ship. He yanked back the slide mechanism, looked into the breach the way he was supposed to, and then squeezed the trigger, and a goddamn big bullet came roaring out of the end of his gun. The bullet went right through the ditty bag, and then started ricocheting all over the compartment, bouncing from one bulkhead to another. It almost killed Klein when it finally lodged in his mattress. It had sounded like a goddamned skirmish down there, and it had attracted the OD.

Well, this was about two months ago, when we were still in Norfolk, and the skipper ordered that any sidearms carried aboard his ship would have no magazines in them from then on. That went for the guys standing gangway watch when we were tied up, too. They'd carry nothing in their rifles and nothing in the cartridge belts around their waists. Nobody gave a damn because there was nothing to shoot in the States anyway.

I watched Ferguson walk away from the quarterdeck and then head for the gun locker right opposite Sick Bay, the key to the heavy lock in his hands. I walked past the quarterdeck, too, and hung around in the midships passageway reading the dope sheet. I saw Ferguson twist

the key in the hanging lock, and then undog the hatch. He pulled the hatch open, and stepped into the gun locker, and I left the midships passageway just as he flicked the light on inside.

"Hi," I said, walking in.

He looked up, startled, and then said, "Oh, hi, Peters."

The rifles were stacked in a rack alongside one bulkhead, and a dozen or so .45's hung from their holster belts on a bar welded to another bulkhead. Ferguson rooted around and finally came up with a metal box which he opened quickly. He turned his back to me and pulled out a magazine, and the ship rolled a little and the .45's on the bar swung a little. He moved closer to the light so he could see what the hell he was doing, his back still turned to me.

I threw back the flap on one of the holsters and yanked out a .45, the walnut stock heavy in my hand. I stuck the gun inside my shirt and into the band of my trousers, cold against my sweating stomach. I heard Ferguson ram the clip home into his own .45, and then he said, "Come on, Peters. I got to lock up."

I followed him out, and even helped him dog the hatch. He snapped the lock, and I said, "Think I'll turn in."

Ferguson nodded sourly. "You can sleep in this heat, you're a better man than I am, Gunga Din."

I smiled and walked back aft toward the fantail. I wanted to sit down someplace and feel the gun in my hands. But it was so damned hot that every guy and his brother was abovedecks, either hanging around smoking or getting his mattress ready for the night. I went into the head, and the place was packed, as usual.

The gun was hot against my skin now, and I wanted to take it out and look at it, but I couldn't do that because I didn't want anyone to remember they'd seen me with a .45.

I kept hanging around, waiting for the crowd to thin, but the crowd didn't thin. You couldn't sleep in all that heat, and nobody felt like trying. Before I knew it, it was 2345, and Ferguson was coming around to wake me for the mid watch. Only I wasn't sleeping, and he found me gassing near the aft five inch mount.

"You're being paged, Peters," he said.

"Okay," I told him. I went forward, and then up the ladder to the passageway outside the radar shack. Centralla was sitting in front of the Sugar George, a writing pad open on his lap.

Hi, boy," I said. "You're liberated."

"Allah be praised," he said, smiling a white smile in his dark face. He got to his feet and pointed to a speaker bolted into the overhead. "That's the only speaker you got, boy," he said. "Nothing on it all night. Just static."

"You sure it's plugged in?"

"I'm sure. You take down anything for Cavalcade. That's 'All ships.' You also take down anything for Wonderland. That's us."

"No kidding," I said.

"In case you didn't know, Peters."

"Well, thanks," I said, smiling.

"You'll probably get a weather report for Guantanamo Bay and vicinity pretty soon." Centrella shrugged. "There's some joe in the pot, and I think those radio guys got a pie from the cook. They wouldn't give me none, and it's probably all gone by now. But maybe you got influence."

"Yeah," I said.

"Okay, you relieving me?"

"The watch is relieved," I said. "Go hit the sack."

Centrella nodded and head for the door. "Oh, yeah," he said, turning, "the old man's in his cabin. He wants anything important brought right to him."

"What does he consider important?" I asked.

"How the hell do I know?"

"That's a big help. Go to sleep, Centrella."

" 'Night," he said, and then he stepped out into the passageway.

I was ready to close the door after him. I had the knob in my hand, when Parson stuck his wide palm against the metal.

"Hey, boy," he said, "you ain't going to close the door in this heat?"

"Hi, Parson," I said dully. I'd wanted to close the door so I could get a better look at the gun.

"You got any hot joe, man?" he asked.

"I think there's some," I told him.

"Well, I got some pie. You like apple pie?"

He didn't wait for an answer. He shoved his way into the shack, and put the pie down on one of the plotting boards. Then he went to the electric grill, shook the joe pot, and said, "Hell, enough here for a regiment."

He took two white cups from the cabinet under the grille, and poured the joe. Then he reached under for the container of evap, and the sugar bowl. The radio shack was right down the passageway, you see, and most of the radio guys knew just where we kept everything. We went in there for coffee, too, whenever none was brewing in the radar shack, so that made things sort of even. Only, I could have done without Parson's company tonight.

"Come on, man," he said, "dig in."

I walked over to the plotting board and lifted a slice of pie, and Parson said, "How many sugars?"

"Two."

He spooned the sugar into my coffee, stirred it for me, and handed me the steaming mug.

"This is great stuff on a hot night," I told him.

"You should've asked for battleship duty," Parson said. "They got ice cream parlors aboard them babies."

"Yeah," I said. The steam from the coffee rose up and touched my face, and I began to sweat more profusely. I put down the cup and reached for a handkerchief, and I was wiping my face when the old man popped in.

"Atten*tion!*" I shouted, and Parson leaped to his feet, almost knocking over his cup. The old man was in silk pajamas, and he stormed into the shack like something on a big black horse.

"At ease," he shouted, and then he yelled, "What the hell is going on here, Peters?"

"We were just having a little coffee, sir. We . . ."

"What is this, the Automat? Where'd you get that pie?"

I looked to Parson, and Parson said, "One of the cooks, sir. He . . ."

"That's against my orders, Parson," the skipper bellowed. "I don't like thieves aboard my . . ."

"Hell, sir, I didn't steal . . ."

"And I don't like profanity, either. Who's on watch here?"

"I am, sir," I said.

"Where are you supposed to be, Parson?"

"Next door, sir. In the radio . . ."

"Am I to understand that you're supposed to be standing a radio watch at this time, Parson?"

"Yes, sir, but . . ."

"*Then what the hell are you doing in here?*" the old man roared.

"I thought I'd . . ."

"Get down to the OD, Parson. Tell him I've put you on report. This'll mean a Captain's Mast for you, sailor."

"Sir," I said, "he was only . . ."

"You shut up, Peters! I see you still haven't got that haircut."

"We were out with the drone, sir. I couldn't . . ."

"Get it first thing tomorrow," he said, ignoring the fact that we'd be out with the cruiser tomorrow. "And now you can dump that coffee pot over the side, and I want that sugar and milk returned to the mess hall."

"I'm on watch, sir," I said coldly.

"Do it when you're relieved, Peters." He stood glaring at me, and then asked, "Were there any important messages, or were you too busy dining?"

"None, sir," I said.

"All right. I'm going out to the boat deck now to get those men below. I don't like my ship looking like a garbage scow. Men aren't supposed to sleep abovedecks."

"Yes, sir," I said.

"I'll be there if anything comes for me. When I come back, you'll hear me going up the ladder outside. I'll be in my cabin then. Is that clear?"

"Yes, sir," I said tightly.

"All right." He walked out, and Parson watched him go and then said, "Someday that man's gonna get it, Dave. Someday."

I didn't say anything. I watched Parson go down to the OD, and I thought: *Not someday. Now.*

I heard the old man yelling out on the boat deck, and then I heard the grumbling as the guys out there stirred and began packing their mattresses and gear. I was sweating very heavily, and I didn't think it was from the heat this time. I could feel the hard outline of the .45 against my belly, and I wanted to rip the gun out and just run out onto the boatdeck and pump the bastard full of holes, but that wasn't the smart way.

The smart way was to be in a spot where I could dump the gun over the side. I stepped out of the radar shack and looked down the passageway to where the skipper was waving his arms and ranting on the boatdeck. There was a gun mount tacked to the side of the ship just outside the passageway and the radar shack. The hatch was closed, and I undid the dogs on it, and shoved it out, and then stepped outside, stationing myself near the magazine box alongside the 20mm mount. I could see the ladder leading up to the bridge and the captain's cabin from where I was standing. My idea was to plug the captain, dump the gun, and then rush inside, as if I were just coming out of the radar shack after hearing the shot.

I could hear the captain ending his tirade, and I thought to myself that it was the last time he'd chew anybody out. I thought everybody was going to be real tickled about this. Hell, I'd probably get a medal from the crew. It was all over out there on the boat deck now, and I peeked into the passageway and saw the old man step through the hatch and glance briefly into the radio shack.

I pulled the .45 out of my shirt.

The gun was very heavy and very hot. My hand slipped on the walnut grip, and I shifted hands and wiped the sweat off on the back of my dungarees. I took a firmer grip on the gun, with the sweat running down my face and over my neck and trickling down my back, sticky and warm. I thumbed off the safety, and the old man passed the radar shack and didn't even look in, and I sucked in a deep breath and waited.

And then he was starting up the ladder, and I thought, *Now, you louse, now!* and I sighted the gun at the back of his neck.

I squeezed the trigger.

There was a dull click and nothing else, and I was shocked for a second, but I squeezed off again, and there was another dull click, and the old man was already halfway up the steps, and he still hadn't turned. I squeezed the trigger twice more, but I got empty clicks both times, and then the old man was out of sight, heading toward his cabin.

I looked down at the gun on my hand, realizing it was empty, realizing there was no clip in it. I remembered the captain's orders about no magazines allowed in sidearms or pieces, and I remembered that Ferguson had gone to the gun locker to get a clip for his own empty .45.

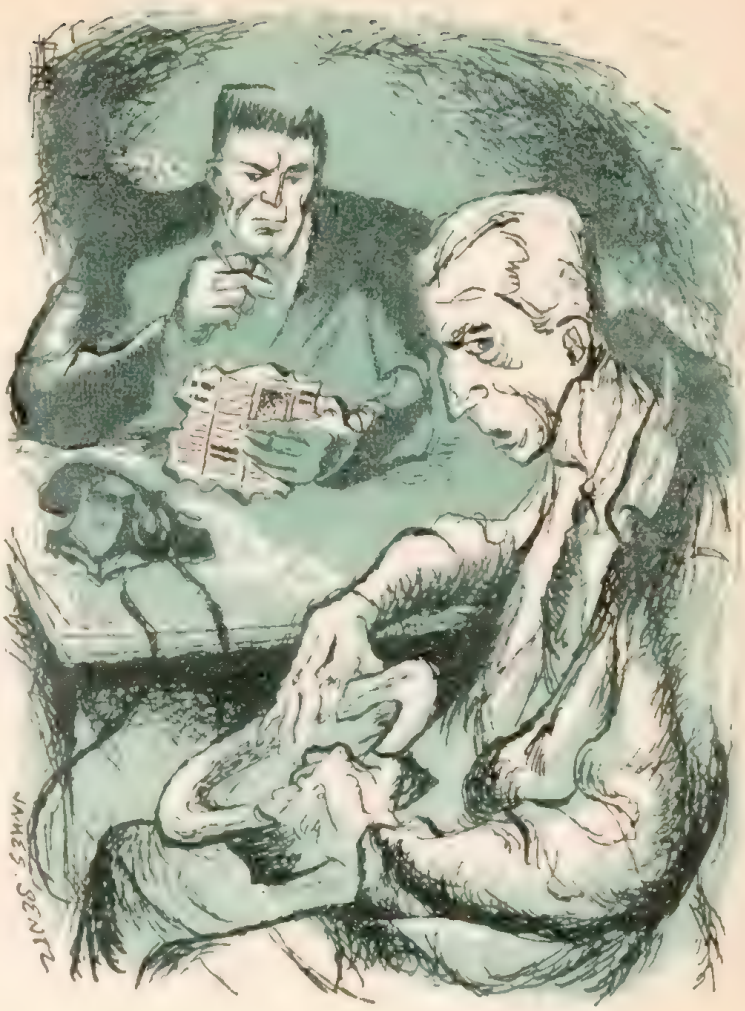
I was still sweating, and the hand holding the gun was trembling now, as if I was just realizing what I'd almost done, just realizing that I'd almost killed a man.

I felt kind of foolish. Maybe an empty gun makes you feel that way. Or maybe the anger had burned itself out when I'd heard those stupid empty clicks. Maybe that, and maybe I was a little glad the gun had been empty, because chewing out a man is one thing, but killing a man is another. He chewed everybody out, when you got down to it, and nobody had gunned him down yet. Just me. Just me, who would have already committed murder if it hadn't been for an order the captain issued a long time ago. Me, from Red Bank, New Jersey — a murderer.

I dumped the gun over the side, and I heard the small splash when it hit the water, and then I heard the speaker in the radar shack calling, "Cavalcade, Cavalcade . . ."

I ran in and began copying down the weather forecast for Guantanamo Bay, and the weather forecast said there would be rain tonight, and I all at once felt a lot cooler.

*"I killed Al six months ago," the man told Liddell. "Then, yesterday, I read in the paper that he'd just died."*



*A Johnny Liddell Novelette*

**BY FRANK KANE**

# Return Engagement

THE MAN in the client's chair was old, tired. White bristles glinted on his chin. His eyes were dull, colorless, almost hidden by heavy, discolored pouches. A thin film of perspiration glistened on his forehead. He watched Johnny Liddell study the torn newspaper clipping.

"I killed him, Liddell. He ruined me. I had to kill him." He tugged a balled-up handkerchief from his hip pocket, swabbed at his forehead.

Liddell scowled at the clipping, tossed it on his desk. "When was this, Terrell?"

The old man licked at his lips. "That's the crazy part about it. It was six months ago. Last September."

Liddell grunted. "He sure took his time about dying. This is Monday's paper. Says he was just killed."

Terrell nodded jerkily. "It's a

trap. They're trying to trap me, Liddell." He plucked at his lower lip with a shaking hand. "Don't you understand? That story's a plant."

Liddell considered it. "Why bait a trap six months later, Terrell? Why not right after it happened?"

"How do I know?" The old man pulled himself out of the chair, paced the room. Abel Terrell had been a big man. Now his clothes hung in pathetic folds on his gaunt frame, and his expensive suit was shabby and worn. He stopped next to Liddell. "I just know it's got to be a frame." He jabbed at the clipping with a bony finger. "They say he was killed in a hit and run accident. I should know how he died. I pulled the trigger. I saw him die."

"The paper says he was unidentified. What name did you know him by?"

Terrell walked back to his chair, dropped into it. "Lee. Dennis Lee." He rubbed the palm of his hand across his eyes. "And don't try to tell me it's a case of mistaken identity, Liddell. I'd know his face anywhere. I've seen it often enough in my dreams these past six months."

"And you're sure it's the same?"

"Positive."

"Well, there's one way to find out if it's a trap." The private detective reached down into his bottom drawer, pulled out a bottle and some paper cups. "You get yourself some rest and I'll amble down to see if the John Doe they've got on ice is an old client of mine." He motioned to the bottle. "A drink help?"

Terrell nodded, gnawed nervously at his thumb nail. "You don't think they'll suspect something? Follow you, maybe?"

Liddell grinned. "It's been tried." He picked up a cup, walked across the room to where a water cooler stood against the wall, humming to itself. He filled the cup, brought it back, set it on the corner of the desk. "I wouldn't worry too much about it." He pushed an empty cup and the bottle to the edge of the desk, watched while the older man poured himself a stiff drink and softened it with a touch of water. "Was there any identifying mark on Dennis Lee that would make the identification positive? In my mind, at any rate."

"He won't be there, I tell you. He couldn't be. He's been dead six months!"

"That's just the point," the private detective nodded. "I don't want them to be able to palm off a phony on me. How about it? Anything I can look for?"

Terrell took a deep swallow from the cup, wiped a vagrant drop from his chin with the side of his hand. "There was a scar. Right under the right ear. You wouldn't notice it until he got mad. Then it turned red." He finished his drink, crumpled the paper in his fist. "About three inches long, ran along the jawbone."

Liddell nodded. "That ought to

do it. You got a place to stay?"

The old man shook his head. "I've been afraid to stay in one place more than one night. I've been running ever since it happened."

"Well, maybe now you can stop running." He walked around the desk, scribbled a note on a sheet of paper. "You take this note to Ed Blesch at the Hotel Carson. He'll know what to do."

Terrell took the note, read it incuriously. "Hotel Carson? Where's that?"

"47th off Sixth. It's a fleabag, but you'll be safe there. Stay in your room until I call you."

"How do I register?"

"Any name but your own. Try George Tefft."

The old man nodded, pulled himself laboriously from his chair. "You won't be too long?" Liddell shook his head, watched the man shuffle to the door, where he stopped with his hand on the knob. "You think somebody spotted me and tipped them off? You think that's why they set the trap?"

"If it is a trap."

The old man thought about it, nodded his head. "It's a trap. Lee's been dead six months. He couldn't have died Monday." He opened the door, walked through to the outer office, and closed the door behind him.

Liddell picked up the clipping again, scowled at the face that stared back at him. The caption read: "Know this man? Police have announced that John Doe, victim of a hit and run accident at the corner of Fifth Avenue and 58th Street early this morning has still been unidentified at press time. He carried no identification when the body was found."

2.

The morgue was at the end of a long, silent corridor in the basement of City Hospital. There were two doors at the far end, one lettered *Medical Examiner* on frosted glass, the other opening into a brightly lighted room, painted a sterile white. A tall, thin bald man sat at a white enamelled desk, biting on the almost invisible nail of his left thumb while making entries in a ledger. The unshaded bulb in the ceiling caused the attendant's bald pate to gleam shinily.

He looked up as Liddell crossed the room to where he sat, and seemed glad of an excuse to put his pen down. He fished a handkerchief from his pocket, polished the bald spot with a circular swabbing motion. "Looking for someone?" His voice was rusty, as though he didn't get much chance to use it.

"Understand you've got a John Doe you're trying to get a make on." Liddell flipped his credentials in front of the man's eyes.

The thin man shook his head. "Not us, mister. We got a make on all our guests." He continued to gnaw on the macerated cuticle.

Liddell pulled the clipping from his pocket, flipped it on the man's desk. "How about this one? Says here he was John Doe'd."

The attendant took his thumb from his mouth, leaned over the picture, studied it. "Oh, him. Identification came up with a make on him this morning. Prints on file in Washington." He stared up at Liddell with washed-out blue eyes. "Friend of yours?"

Liddell shrugged. "Could be. The picture wasn't too good. Any chance of seeing him?"

The thin man nodded. "Ain't much to look at. Bounced his head off the curb, looks like." He got up, limped around the desk. "Come with me."

He led the way to a heavy door set in the far wall and tugged it open. Beyond was a high-ceilinged, stone-floored, unheated room with double tiers of metal lockers. Each locker had its own stencilled number.

Liddell wrinkled his nose as the blast of carbolic-laden air enveloped them. There was no word spoken as he followed the thin man across the floor to the rear of the windowless room. The attendant stopped in front of one row of drawers, tugged on a handle. The drawer pulled out with a screech. A piece of canvas that bulged slightly covered its contents.

The attendant reached up and pulled on a high-powered light in an enamel reflector. He grabbed the corner of the canvas, pulled it back, exposing the body of a man.

The face was oyster-white, the hair dank and damp. Despite the misshapen head, it was obviously the body of the man pictured in the clipping.

"That's your boy," the attendant grunted. He pursed his lips, studied the dead man objectively. "Never knew what hit him. Like I said, looks like he bounced his head off the curb."

Liddell nodded. He placed one finger against the dead man's right cheek, rolled the head to the side. The skin was clammy and cold to his touch. He bent closer to the body, detected the three-inch scar that ran along the side of the jaw bone, grunted under his breath.

The attendant watched the performance curiously, swore when the phone in his office started pealing. "Damn thing always rings when you're nowhere near it." He nodded at the body. "Got enough?"

"You go ahead and answer your phone. I'll wait."

The thin man seemed undecided, then shrugged his shoulders. "Guess you can't walk off with him." He showed the yellowed stumps of his teeth in a grin. "Got one babe stashed away I wouldn't trust nobody with, but this one ain't that pretty."

His bad leg clip-clopped across the floor as he hurried to answer the phone. As soon as he had disappeared through the door leading to the

outer office, Liddell whipped back the canvas. There were no signs of bullet wounds or any scars of any nature with the exception of an old appendix scar. Liddell scowled at the unmarred expanse of abdomen, pulled the canvas back into place.

He was standing with his hands in his jacket pocket when the attendant limped back across the room.

"Make him?" the thin man wanted to know. He recovered the dead man's face, slammed the drawer back into place with a clang that reverberated through the entire room."

"I'm not sure. What was the make on him?"

The attendant shook his head. "You'll have to get that from the medical examiner's office." He watched with interest while Liddell's hand disappeared into his pocket, re-appeared with a folded bill. "Although I may have it in my records," he amended hastily.

He fell into step beside Liddell as they re-crossed the room to the office. Outside, he walked around the desk, pulled open a drawer in a small card file, flipped through it. "His name was Dennis Leeman. Mean anything to you?"

Liddell ignored the question, stuck a cigarette in the corner of his mouth. He lit it, filled his lungs with smoke and expelled it in twin streams through his nostrils in an effort to clean out the morgue smell. "Nobody claim him yet?"

The attendant dropped the card back into the file, pushed the drawer shut. "Not yet." He sank into his chair, stared up at Liddell. "My guess is nobody's going to claim him. Unless he's got relatives out of state."

Liddell nodded. "Where's your phone?"

The thin man motioned to the instrument on his desk. "Be my guest."

Liddell dialled the number of the Hotel Carson, asked the operator for George Tefft. "One moment, please," the receiver rattled back.

He could hear the buzz as the switchboard rang, then, "Mr. Tefft doesn't answer. Would you care to leave a message?"

Liddell glowered at the mouthpiece, shook his head. "No message."

## 3.

The Hotel Carson was an old, weather-beaten stone building that nestled anonymously in a row of similarly weather-beaten stone buildings that line the north side of 47th Street. A small plaque to the right of the door dispelled any doubts as to its identity.

A threadbare and faded carpet that ran the length of the lobby had long ago given up any pretence of serving any useful purpose. The chairs were rickety and unsafe, the artificial rubber plants grimed with dust.

Johnny Liddell waved to the watery-eyed man behind the registration desk, who raised his eyes from the scratch sheet only long enough to return the salutation. The private detective headed for the lone elevator cage in the rear. A pimpled youth with slack lips and discolored bags under his eyes nodded to him as he got in.

"Blesch take care of the old guy I sent over for cold storage?" he asked as the operator followed him into the cage, slammed the door after him.

"Yeah, but the old guy ain't there now." He checked the watch on his wrist. "He checks in about three and about fifteen minutes later he goes tearing out. Kind of surprised me. When he went up, he was carrying an armful of papers. I figured he was holing up for the winter."

Liddell cursed softly. "I sent him over here to stay put."

The pimple faced operator shrugged. "Nobody tells me he's not supposed to go." He eyed Liddell curiously. "Guy hot or something, you're burying him?"

"No. I just wanted him where I could lay my hands on him for some information. He'll be back. I'll wait in his room."

The elevator stopped at the fourth floor with a spine-jarring jerk. The operator slammed open the grill doors, propped them open. "I got a pass key here. I'll let you in." He led the way down the corridor to 412, pushed the door open. He stuck his head in, looked around curiously. "Gone all right."

Liddell slipped him a folded bill, walked into the room, closed the door behind him. Both the bedroom and bathroom were empty. A light had been left burning in a bridge lamp next to the room's only chair. Dumped alongside the chair was a stack of rumpled newspapers.

Liddell walked over, picked up a sheet that had been crumpled into a ball, smoothed it out. The item was a small one at the bottom of a column. It merely stated that the victim of Monday night's hit and run accident had been identified as Dennis Leeman, address unknown.

He stared at the item for a moment, crumpled the paper back into a ball, threw it in the direction of the waste basket. The telephone was on a cigarette-scarred night table next to the bed. He picked up the instrument, asked for the manager's office.

"Blesch speaking," a tired, gruff voice informed him.

"Ed, this is Liddell. I'm in 412. My boy's gone. Any idea where or when?"

Blesch sighed audibly. "You just asked me to check him in, pally. You didn't say anything about watchdogging him. All I know's he made a couple of calls just before he went out. I had the operator keep an eye on the room." A worried note crept into his voice. "No trouble?"

"No trouble," Liddell assured him. "I've got some good news for the guy and I want to pass it along."

"One of the calls was to your office, the other to Stanton 7-6770. He didn't get an answer on the Stanton number and went tearing out."

"Got any idea who has that Stanton number?"

"Look, pally. You're the detective. Me, I got other things on my mind. Running a riding academy like this ain't the best way to grow old gracefully." There was a click as he dropped the receiver back on its hook.

Liddell hung up his receiver, stared at it for a moment. He debated the advisability of waiting until Terrell returned, voted it down. He dropped by the front desk on his way out, left word for the old man to call him as soon as he came in.

4.

Johnny Liddell sat with his desk chair tilted back, staring out the window at Bryant Park twelve stories below. He helped himself to a slug of bourbon from the bottle in the bottom drawer, emptied the paper cup, tossed it at the waste basket.

He consulted his watch, frowned at the time. Almost seven! He reached for the telephone, dialled the Hotel Carson, verified the fact that his client hadn't returned.

He had just hung up the receiver when the phone started to shrill. He let it ring twice, picked up the receiver.

"Liddell?" The voice was familiar, but not the old man's.

"Yeah."

"This is Mike Flannery, Inspector Herlehy's driver. He wants to see you. Can you get down to Perry and Ninth in the Village?"

Liddell frowned at the receiver. "I guess so, but —"

"The inspector says to hurry." The line went dead.

The cab made the distance from midtown to the Village in a record time. Liddell pushed a bill through the front window to the driver, walked across the street to where Inspector Herlehy's black limousine stood against the curb in front of a large excavation.

The driver nodded to him. "He's down in the ditch with a friend of yours," Flannery told him. "He thought you might want in on this."

Abel Terrell was sprawled out on his back, staring up at the small circle of men around him unblinkingly. His heavily knuckled hands were clasped across his midsection as though in a last desperate effort to stem the red tide that had seeped through the laced fingers and had spread in an ugly dark stain on his jacket.

He was dead.

Johnny Liddell looked from the body to Inspector Herlehy. "When did it happen, inspector?"

The inspector pushed his sheriff-style fedora on the back of his head, chomped heavily on the ever-present wad of gum. "Can't tell for sure until the medical examiner gets here. We got the report twenty minutes ago." He took a leather notebook from the man next to him, flipped through the pages. "Couple of kids discovered the body, phoned it in." He snapped the notebook shut, handed it back to his aide. "My guess is he hasn't been dead much over an hour. Ninety minutes at the outside."

Liddell pulled out a pack of cigarettes, held it up for approval, drew a nod. He hung one in his mouth where it waggled when he talked. "How come you called me?" He touched a match to the cigarette, drew a deep drag.

"You tell me what your connection with him was." Herlehy clasped his hands behind his back, rocked on the balls of his feet.

"You're sure there is a connection?"

"Your name and address were written on a slip of paper in his pocket." The inspector reached into his jacket pocket, brought out a folded note. "You gave him a note to Ed Blesch at the Carson telling him to sign the guy in. Why?"

Liddell shrugged. "He was a client. I wanted him on ice until I could get some information he needed."

Someplace in the distance, a siren wailed shrilly.

"Come on, Liddell. Don't make me pick it out of you. Who is this guy and what was the beef?" He squinted at a pencilled memo. "He registered into the hotel as Tefft. That his name?"

"No. His name's Terrell. He came into my office this morning. Said he killed a man six months ago."

Herlehy scowled. "So you buried him instead of turning him in?"

"It wasn't that simple," Liddell argued. "The man he thought he killed six months ago, turns up dead in a hit and run accident on Monday. He thought it was a trap to bring him into the open. It wasn't."

The inspector spit out a wad of gum, pulled a fresh stick from his pocket, started to denude it. "Guy pulled through, eh?"

Liddell grinned glumly. "That's the funny part of it, inspector. I looked the body over very carefully. There wasn't a sign of a bullet wound on it."

Outside a siren reached for a high note, faded away as the ambulance skidded to a stop at the curb. Two men from the medical examiner's office walked into the excavation, tossed an incurious glance at the body.

"Too bad we've got to move him. After he made it so nice and convenient. Just cover him with dirt and he's set," one of them grinned. "Your boys through with him?"

The inspector nodded. "Where you fellows been?"

"You're not the only division giving us business, you know," the newcomer grinned. He waited until his companion had finished a cursory examination of the body. "Okay to take him?"

"Be my guest," the inspector nodded. He initialled a form, handed it back to the m.e.'s man, watched while a stretcher was brought in and the body loaded onto it. "Let's have a report as soon as you can."

The man in white thought about it for a moment, nodded. "Maybe this will hold you over for awhile. From the looks of the hole in his belly, I'd say it was a pretty safe bet he didn't die of high blood pressure." He followed the covered stretcher out to the ambulance at the curb.

"Very funny fellow," Liddell opined.

"No funnier than the story you're telling, Liddell." The inspector caught him by the arm, led him out to the sidewalk where his limousine sat waiting. "This guy shot a guy, only the guy dies six months later from an auto accident. He knows he pumped the bullets into him, only there's no signs of gunshot scars." He stopped on the sidewalk, oblivious to the crowd of morbidly curious that had gathered. "That's supposed to make sense?" he growled. "Did he at least tell you why he was supposed to have killed this character?"

Liddell considered it for a moment, shook his head. "Not exactly. He just said Lee had ruined him. That he had to kill him."

"Now I suppose you're going to tell me this character he was supposed to have killed but didn't isn't really dead and got up off the slab in the morgue to kill him?"

"That would be a switch," Liddell conceded, "but the last I saw of Lee, he wasn't in any condition to do any traveling. Look, Inspector, I'd like a crack at breaking this one. I can, too, if you'll give me a break."

"Meaning?"

"Don't mention the fact that Terrell took me on. Just give out the story that a vagrant was found shot to death in a foundation excavation in the Village. Let me take it from there."

Herlehy scowled at him. "On one condition. I'm checking the files on this murder he's supposed to have committed. If there's one on the books, no deal. If he was just dreaming the whole thing, you're welcome to it."

"It's a deal. He was supposed to have knocked off this Lee character six months ago. In September. If there's an open file, I keep hands off and let the department handle it. If there isn't, I get first crack at it."

5.

Stanton 7–6770 turned out to be the telephone number of a little night club called the Club Canopy on Perry Street, two blocks south of

where Abel Terrell's body had been found. It was 10:30 by the time Johnny Liddell arrived there. He stood across the street, studied the outside of the club.

A neon that sputtered fitfully and dyed the facade a dull red spelled out the name *Club Canopy*. The door was three steps up from the sidewalk, and opened into a small vestibule.

Liddell crossed the street, entered the club. The vestibule had been converted into a check room. Beyond lay the main dining room and bar, a huge room that had been constructed by knocking out all the walls on the floor.

He stood at the door and peered into the smoky opaqueness of the interior. Small tables, jammed with parties of four, were packed side by side in a small space bordering on the tiny square reserved for dancing. A thick pall of smoke hung over the entire room, swirling slowly and lazily in the draft from the opened door. The bar itself was long, well-filled. Liddell elbowed himself a place at the bar, turned to survey the room.

The bartender shuffled up, wiped the bar with a damp cloth that left oily circles.

"Bourbon and water," Liddell told him.

The bartender made a production of selecting a bottle from the back-bar, reaching under the bar for a glass and some ice. He poured about an ounce of the brown liquid into the glass, reached for the water.

"Better hit that again," Liddell told him.

He made the drink a double, softened it with a touch of water.

Liddell shoved a five at him. "Keep the change."

The bartender took a look at the corner of the bill, raised his eyebrows. "If you figure this buys you anything but liquor in this joint, you're making a mistake."

Liddell tasted the bourbon, approved. "I'm looking for a friend of mine." Quickly he described Abel Terrell, waited while the bartender screwed his mouth up in concentration. "Have you seen him or his friend lately?"

The bartender blew out his lips, shook his head. "He don't register. He's no regular around here." He squinted into the dimness of the room. "Maybe Ed Carter can help you. He's the maitre d'. He gets to know a lot of people I don't ever see." He looked longingly at the bill. "Still go?"

Liddell nodded, watched the bartender shuffle off to the cash register. He happily dumped some silver and a few bills into the glass on the back bar, nodded his thanks to Liddell.

After a moment, a heavy man in a blue suit stopped alongside Liddell. "Can I help you, sir? Mike tells me you're waiting for someone."

Liddell swung around, studied the newcomer. His face was heavy, his lips wet and pouting. His hair

was almost white, combed in a three-quarter part. His eyes were expressionless black discs almost hidden in the shadow of fierce white eyebrows. In his lapel he wore a carnation.

"I expected to meet a friend of mine here. His name's Abel Terrell." Liddell fancied he caught a flicker in the eyes, but there was no other change of expression in the fat man's face. "Do you know him?"

The fat man pursed his lips. Little bubbles formed in the middle of them. He shook his head, waggling the heavy jowls that hung over his collar. "I can't say I do. Could you describe him for me?"

Liddell tried to paint a word picture of the dead man as he might have appeared before he lost weight.

The fat man nodded slowly as Liddell finished his description. "I believe I do know your friend by sight." His head continued to bob in agreement. "He was a great admirer of our Miss Patti. You've heard Miss Patti, of course?"

Liddell shook his head. "I don't get around much."

The fat lips were wreathed in a smile that did nothing to change the expression in the man's eyes. "Then you have a treat in store. Miss Patti comes on in a few minutes. I'm sure she'll be glad to see you in her dressing room after the show."

He nodded to Liddell, moved down the bar. Several times, he stopped for a brief visit with one of his older customers. Finally, he reached the end of the bar, disappeared into the dimness beyond.

Liddell was on his second double bourbon when the floor lights went down. The band struggled hopelessly with a fanfare, a spotlight cut the gloom of the room, picked out the wasp-waisted figure of the master of ceremonies as he fluttered across the floor to the microphone. He told a few off-color jokes, sang two choruses of an old song in a nasal whine, held his hands up to stem the non-existent applause.

"And now what you've all been waiting for — the sweetheart of Greenwich Village, Miss Patti!"

The bartender shuffled down to where Liddell sat, took up his station behind him. "This gal is all woman. An awful waste in a joint like this, but she really packs a message," he whispered.

On the floor two men were wheeling out a baby grand. A pasty-faced man with aggressively curly hair and a wet smear for a mouth materialized from nowhere and took his place at the piano. His fingers jumped from key to key until the first bars of a torchy tune became recognizable. The backdrop curtains parted and a blonde stepped out into the spotlight.

She was tall. Thick, metallic golden hair cascaded down over her shoulders in shimmering waves. Her body was ripe, lush. A small waist hinted at the full rounded hips and long shapely legs concealed by the fullness of the gown.

The rumble of conversation died down to a whisper, glasses stopped jangling and waiters froze as she leaned back against the piano. Her voice was husky, the kind that raised the small hairs on the back of Liddell's neck.

The lyrics of her song were blue and off color, but she managed to retain an expression of untroubled innocence. At the end of two numbers, she bowed to a burst of applause, permitted herself to be coaxed into one encore. At the end of that number, she refused to be persuaded to do more, turned and went to the backstage door.

Liddell drained his glass, set it back on the bar. An adagio team was just making its appearance on the floor when he reached the end of the bar. He reached the backstage door, started to pull it open when a hand caught him by the arm.

"You're going in the wrong direction, mister," a heavy voice told him. "The men's room's at the other end." The owner of the hand and voice was heavy-shouldered, and the twisted nose and scar tissue over the eyes identified him as a bouncer.

"That's all right, Stanley." The fat figure of Carter, the manager, materialized in the gloom. "The gentleman's a friend of Miss Patti."

"You told me nobody gets in there," the big man grumbled. "I don't like nobody bothering Patti." He glowered at Liddell. "I'm looking after her. Nobody gets fresh with her. You follow me, friend?"

"Nobody's going to bother Miss Patti, Stanley," the fat man told him firmly. "This gentleman is a friend. Miss Patti will be glad to see him."

The bouncer shuffled his feet uncertainly for a moment, then turned and shuffled off.

"A very difficult man, Stanley." Carter smelled at the carnation in his buttonhole. "Entirely devoted to Miss Patti. A dog-like devotion, you might say." The flat eyes studied Liddell over the carnation.

Stepping through the door to backstage was like stepping into a new world. The tinsel and glamor of the Club Canopy frontside wasn't duplicated backstage. There was nothing but a long, bare, semi-dark corridor with a row of closed doors, an odor compounded of equal parts of perspiration and perfume.

He stopped in front of a door on which had been stencilled *Miss Patti* and knocked. A throaty voice invited him in.

The blonde sat on a straight-backed chair in front of a littered make-up table. Her thick blonde hair had been pushed back from her face, caught with a blue ribbon and allowed to cascade down her back. She wore a matching light blue dressing gown.

She looked up as Liddell walked in. Her eyes were the bluest he had ever seen, her mouth soft and moist. She looked him over, made no attempt to disguise her approval of the heavyset shoulders, the thick

hair spiked with grey and the humorous half-grin.

"Well, who are you?" Her speaking voice was husky, intimate.

"A friend of Abel Terrell's. He asked me to meet him here tonight." He checked the watch on his wrist. "He's late. I thought maybe you might know where he was."

The blonde pursed her lips, shook her head. "I haven't seen Abel in months." She lowered her voice. "He had some kind of trouble and had to go away." She turned the full impact of her eyes on him. "Is it safe for him to show his face around? I wouldn't want anything to happen to him."

Liddell found two cigarettes, lighted both, passed one to her. "When he called me, he said he had everything straightened out. He wanted me to bring him some money."

The blonde took a deep drag of the cigarette, let the smoke drift from between half-parted lips. "I'm glad for him if everything is all right." She studied Liddell's face through the eddying smoke. "Didn't he say what he wanted the money for?"

"I didn't ask." He rolled his cigarette between his thumb and forefinger. "He did mention it had something to do with a man named Lee. Do you know anybody named Lee that was connected with Abel?"

The soft lips framed the name, after a moment the girl shook her head. "I don't think so. I've never heard Abel mention the name to the best of my recollection."

Liddell nodded, raked his fingers through his hair. "I had the feeling the money was for Lee. Abel was very secretive about it, wouldn't even tell me where he'd been for the past few months."

The girl held her finger against her lips, cocked her head prettily. Then she got up, opened the dressing room door a crack. There was no one in the corridor. "We can't talk here. These walls are like paper." She walked back, stood close to Liddell. "Maybe Abel saw someone or something that frightened him away."

"Well, how am I going to contact him to let him know I have the money?" He studied the girl's face. "Do you know where to reach him?"

She turned, walked to the dressing table, picked up a comb, ran it through her hair. "I wouldn't do anything that might hurt Abel."

"But you do know how to contact him?"

She dropped the comb, swung around, leaned back on the table. "How do I know that Abel really wants to see you? How do I know that you're not the man he's hiding from?"

Liddell grinned. "A good question. Ask him."

"And who are you?"

"He'll know. Just tell him Johnny."

"Just Johnny?" The blonde pursed her lips humorously. "Don't I get to know the full name?"

"After you've checked with Abel and satisfied yourself that I'm a right guy, maybe we'll get to know each other well enough that the only name you'll need will be Johnny."

The blue eyes swept him from head to feet and back. "Could be."

"How long will it take you to reach him?"

"I don't know. But I'm through here at 2:30. I'm sure I'll be able to reach him by then. Why can't we meet then."

Liddell nodded. "I'll pick you up here at 2:30."

"We can't talk here. Make it at my place at three. Apartment 2A, 28 Dyson Street — just about four blocks from here. Do you know where it is?"

Liddell shook his head. "I'll find it. I'll be there at three on the dot."

6.

The clerk in the outside office at headquarters told Johnny Liddell that Inspector Herlehy couldn't be disturbed. He let himself be talked into checking with the inspector himself, plugged in the interoffice phone, muttered into it. He nodded, flipped off the switch.

"I guess he'll see you." He sounded impressed.

Herlehy was sitting on the side of the leather couch in his office, running his fingers through his hair. He was yawning when Liddell walked in.

"You keep the damnedest hours," he complained. "I thought you'd be home in bed by now." He got up, walked over to the sink in the corner, slapped cold water into his face.

"How about it? Find a homicide for September in the name of Lee?"

The inspector dried his face on a towel, hung it on a nail next to the sink. "Nope. But we did find that Terrell did a run-out just about that time. Dug up his old secretary. He gave her three months' salary, told her to close the office. She hasn't heard from him since."

Liddell dropped into a chair. "The only way she's likely to now is if she uses an ouija board." He watched the inspector run a comb through his thick white hair. "How about the guy in the morgue?"

Herlehy grunted, stamped back to his desk. "Dennis Leeman. Did time in Chicago for extortion, wanted in L.A. on the same charge." He punched the button on the base of his phone. "Coffee?"

"Black," Liddell nodded.

A uniformed cop stuck his head in the doorway.

"Two coffees, one black, Ray," Herlehy told him. He waited until the cop had withdrawn his head. "Makes it screwier than ever. Suppose this Lee or Leeman was shaking Terrell for something. Okay, so Terrell knocks him off. That fits. Only trouble is Terrell didn't knock him off."

"Terrell thought he did. He held

the rod right against Lee's chest. Saw the blood running from his mouth, he says."

Herlehy drummed on the edge of his desk with his fingers. "You saw the body. Not a mark of a bullet wound." He explored the stubble along his chin with the tips of his fingers. "You don't think this Terrell guy was off his rocker?"

Liddell shrugged. "It could be."

The door opened, the uniformed cop walked in with two containers of coffee, deposited them on the desk. "The black's got a pencilled X on the cap," he told them.

Liddell snagged the container, waited until the cop had closed the door after him. "One thing's for sure. Terrell got an awful jolt when he saw Lee's picture in the paper. He got another one when he read the item about the body being identified." He gouged the top out of the container, tested the coffee, burned his tongue and swore at it. "He made two calls. One was to me, the other to a night club in the Village called the Canopy."

An ugly red flush started up from the inspector's collar. "Then you were holding out on me —"

Liddell shook his head. "He didn't reach anybody there. He called about three and the joint doesn't open until eight. I caught the early show in there tonight. Terrell was mixed up in some way with a girl singer named Patti. I've got a date with her at three at her place."

Herlehy carefully removed the top from his coffee, stirred it with his finger. "What do you expect to find out?"

Liddell rolled the warm container between his palms. "I don't know. But it's a cinch the solution to Terrell's murder is down there someplace. He was killed on Perry Street, the Club Canopy's on Perry Street and the girl has an apartment right across from the north end of the excavation where he was killed."

A tight look creased a V between the inspector's brows. He sipped at his coffee, made concentric circles on his blotter with the wet bottom of the container. "I don't know if I have the right to let you go this alone, Liddell," he said finally. "This is homicide and it's a matter for the department. Suppose you turn in everything you have on it —"

"That ain't cricket, inspector. We made a deal."

Herlehy nodded. "I know. But what you said sounded so screwy I never figured it would stand up."

He took another deep swallow out of the container. "I'm going to have to go back on my word, Liddell. I never had the authority to make any deal like that."

"Give me until morning," Liddell urged. "You can't get the ball rolling until then, anyway. Just give me until morning, then throw the whole thing into the homicide hopper."

Herlehy hesitated, nodded. "Okay. You've got until Lt. Gleason comes

on at eight. After that, you'd better keep out of his way. He doesn't like amateurs messing around on his preserves."

7.

Dyson Court was a square block away from Perry Street in the Village. 28 fronted on the back end of the excavation where Terrell's body had been found. The cab dropped Liddell in front of a brownstone building, he ran up the short flight of steps from the street and pushed his way through the vestibule door. A row of mail boxes in the vestibule contributed the information that Patti Marks occupied Apartment 2A.

The hallway was dark, smelled of ancient cooking and old age. He felt his way along the wall to the stairs, climbed slowly to the second floor. Apartment 2A was second floor front. He knocked softly, waited for some sound from within. He checked his watch, noticed it was only 2:45, knocked again. There was still no answer.

He tried the doorknob, found the door locked. The lock yielded with a minimum of struggle to the strip of celluloid he carried in his pocket. He stepped in, closed the door behind him. The room was in darkness. He stood still, waited until his eyes were accustomed to the dark. There was no sound in the apartment other than his own breathing.

He felt his way across the room, lit the lamp on the table next to the couch, sank onto it. His watch said 2:48.

It was almost three when he heard the sound of a key in the lock. The door swung open, the blonde stood framed in the doorway. Behind her loomed the broad shoulders of the ex-pug bodyguard, Stanley.

Stanley pushed the girl aside. His eyes were small, mean. "What are you doing here?" he growled deep in his chest. "I told you I wouldn't let anyone bother Miss Patti."

He shuffled toward Liddell flat-footedly. When he reached the chair, he caught the detective by the lapels, pulled him to his feet. Liddell broke the hold with an upward and outward swing of his arms and smashed his toe into the big man's instep. The bodyguard grunted with pain, dropped his guard. Liddell sunk his right into the big man's middle, chopped down against the side of his neck with his right. The bodyguard hit the floor face first and didn't move.

The blonde stood frozen, tried to swallow her fist. She looked from Liddell to the unconscious man and back. She closed the door, leaned against it. "You were wonderful. I've never seen anybody take Stanley before." She walked over, knelt next to the prizefighter. "He means well. He's the most devoted friend I've ever had." She looked up at Liddell. "I didn't know you were here or I wouldn't have brought him up. He feels better when he brings

me right to the door and since it looked as though you hadn't arrived —"

Liddell nodded. "I understand." He looked down at the unconscious man. "He's gotten soft from tossing helpless drunks out of the club, I guess."

Patti was staring at him with a puzzled frown. "By the way, how did you get in here?"

"The door was open. I thought you left it that way for me, so I came in and got comfortable."

The blonde walked over to the door, pulled it open, examined the latch. "Funny. I guess it didn't catch." Her eyes went down to the man on the floor. "What do we do about him?"

"He'll be all right in a minute. I'll take care of him." He caught the big man under the arms, dragged him to an armchair, dumped him into it. "It might help if you had some smelling salts."

Patti nodded, headed for the bedroom. As soon as the door had closed behind her, Liddell fanned the unconscious man, found him unarmed. He wiped the perspiration from his upper lip with the back of his hand, waited for the girl's return.

After minutes, the door to the bedroom opened. The blonde had changed from her street dress to a pale blue negligee. The blonde hair had been loosened, permitted to cascade down over her shoulders. "I made myself more comfortable," she said. "I hope you don't mind."

Stanley started to cough and gag his way back to consciousness. At first his head rolled uncontrollably, he seemed to have difficulty in focussing his eyes. After a moment, he was able to hold his head up, fix Liddell with a malevolent glare. A thin stream of saliva glistened from the corner of his mouth down his chin.

"He hit me when I wasn't ready." His voice was thick, strangled. He tried weakly to struggle to his feet, let the blonde push him back into the chair.

"You don't understand, Stanley. He's a friend of mine. He isn't bothering me. I asked him to meet me here." She explained it patiently, as though to a child. "He's my friend. He won't hurt me. Do you understand?"

The big man tried to nod. He struggled to his feet with the help of the blonde. She led him to the door, through to the stairway.

When she came back, Liddell was on the couch, a cigarette between his lips. "You're quite a man, mister." She leaned against the door, studied him speculatively. "Who are you, really?"

"A friend of Abel's. Didn't he tell you?"

The blonde walked over to where he sat, lifted the cigarette from between his fingers, took a deep drag. "I couldn't reach him. You don't mind waiting?"

Liddell grinned at her. "I'll struggle through it."

The blonde returned his cigarette, walked over to a curtained alcove that hid the kitchenette, brought back a bottle and some ice. "We may as well be comfortable." She set the ice and brandy down on a small end table, dropped onto the couch beside him. "I'm surprised I haven't heard from Abel by now," she pouted. "It must be that he's afraid of Lou."

Liddell reached past her, dropped ice into each of the glasses, drenched it down with brandy. "Who's Lou?"

The girl accepted a glass, swirled the liquid around the side. "My husband." She made a face, took a swallow of the brandy. "He's crazy. That's one of the reasons I have Stanley with me all the time. Lou would kill me, if he could lay his hands on me." She turned the full power of her eyes on Liddell over the rim of her glass. "Aren't you worried?"

"Why should I be? In the first place, I didn't know you were married. I'm here on business."

The girl stiffened, her eyes grew wide at the sound of a key in the lock. The door pushed open and a tall, thin man stood in the doorway, his hand sunk deep in his jacket pocket. When he grinned, it consisted merely of the peeling of his lips back from his discolored teeth. "I told you I'd catch you at it some night, baby," his voice was low, lethal. "I saw that punchdrunk bodyguard of yours leave. I've been waiting for you."

The blonde seemed to shrink back against the cushions. "Get out of here. You have no right in here, Lou."

The cold grin was back. "No right in my wife's apartment?" The eyes hop-scotched from the girl to Liddell and back. "No jury would blame me for what I'm going to do."

The blonde licked at her lips. "You're crazy, Lou. You couldn't get away with it." She watched wide-eyed as the man shuffled closer.

"Before I do, I've got something for you." He stopped in front of the girl, slashed the back of his left hand across her cheek.

She moved with lightning speed. Her hand darted under a cushion, re-appeared with an ugly short-snouted .38. Lou swung his hand in an arc, knocked her head to her right shoulder, back handed it into position.

The gun bounced out of her hand, fell to the floor at Liddell's feet.

"Stop him, Johnny, stop him. I can't take any more beatings. Kill him!"

Lou moved clumsily toward the gun, stopped as the private detective scooped it up, held it in his fist.

"Quick! Before he kills us both," the girl screamed.

"Anything to accommodate a lady." Liddell squeezed the trigger five times. The gun jumped in his hands as it belched flame. The other man seemed to stagger under the impact of the slugs. His mouth fell open, blood spurted from between

his teeth, ran down his chin onto his shirt. He grabbed at his midsection with bloodstained hands, fell forward.

8.

The blonde got up, tried to turn him over. She sank her hand into his pocket, looked up with stunned eyes. "He had no gun, Johnny. He was unarmed. It — it was murder."

Liddell stepped toward her. The blonde straightened up, backed away. "No, no don't touch me." She buried her face in her hands, her shoulders shook.

"You wanted him dead, didn't you?"

The girl dropped her hands from her face. "But don't you understand? It's murder." She kept her eyes averted from the man on the floor. "The shots! The police will be here." She ran to the window, pulled back the curtain, looked out. "You'd better get out. Get out of town someplace where I can meet you." When he didn't move, she ran to him, caught his lapels, shook him. "Didn't you hear me? You've got to get out of here."

"What about him?"

The girl caught her lower lip between her teeth. "Stanley will take care of him. He's devoted to me, he'll do anything I say. But he hates you after what you did to him. You'd better not be here." She started pushing him to the door, stopped as if in an afterthought. "But I don't have any money —"

Liddell stuck his hand into his breast pocket, pulled out some bills. "Here. Here's a thousand. There's lots more where that came from."

The blonde wadded it, stuck it down the neck of her negligee. "Hurry. The police will be here!"

Liddell grinned at her. "You're psychic, baby. The police are here." He pulled open the door. Inspector Herlehy walked in. "Pretty good, eh, inspector?"

The color drained slowly from the girl's face. "What is this?"

Liddell ceremoniously turned over the gun to the inspector. "I shot that character on the floor five times at close range." He walked over to where the man lay, stirred him with his foot. "On your feet, Buster. It's time for the curtain call."

Lou struggled to his feet, glared at the girl. "I knew you'd pull it once too often," he growled. He was a macabre sight, his face and shirt stained blood-red.

"You'd better sit down," the inspector told him. "You've lost a lot of blood." He looked at Liddell, nodded. "You had the gimmick pegged. I haven't seen it used in years."

"Okay, so you made a fair pinch," the blonde turned her back, walked over to the end table, poured herself a drink, downed it neat. "I suppose the money was marked so you've got an attempted extortion rap." She looked at Liddell. "You still haven't told me who you are, mister."

"Johnny. Johnny Liddell. I'm the private eye Terrell hired this morning to help him out of this mess."

"A lot of good you did him," she snapped.

"Whose idea was the cackle bladder for shakedowns? Yours or Leeman's?"

"Come again?"

Liddell grinned at her. "That gimmick was old when you were in rompers, baby. The old-time con men used to use it to cool down a mark who started to yell copper. The inside man would provide a gun loaded with blanks, the con man would have the thin rubber bladder filled with chicken blood between his teeth. When he bit the bladder it gave the effect of hemorrhaging from the mouth."

"Okay, so you're real smart. It still only adds up to a year if you get the conviction."

"That's right. A year, and then they electrocute you, baby."

The blonde started. "What are you pulling?"

"How'd you know Terrell was dead?"

"I — the radio. You ought to listen to it once in a while. The midnight news, wise guy."

Liddell shook his head. "Terrell's identity wasn't given out to the papers. Only the killer could have known who he was." He looked to Herlehy. "Right, inspector?"

Herlehy nodded.

"No. You got it wrong. I didn't kill him. Stanley did. He —"

"Stanley might have strangled him or beaten him to death. He would never have used a gun. Besides, it had to be someone Terrell trusted to get him to go down into that dark foundation. He was too scared to go down there with anyone but you."

"Why me?"

"He thought you had been taken in by Leeman, too. He was going to tell you about how Leeman hadn't died six months ago. Then he got wise, didn't he, that Leeman was only your stooge, that you were head of the shake racket."

The blonde sneered at him. "Okay, Rover boy, let's go. I want to find out whether it was a fit of temporary insanity or whether I was defending my honor."

# What's Your Verdict?

BY SAM ROSS

By the time Johnny Smith met pretty Madeline Wells, he'd read up on a little law. He hadn't had any specific purpose in mind, but he did have a vague idea that law might come in handy some day. Madeline Wells, the first time he saw her, reminded him of a chapter in his law book headed *Seduction*. During the first few dates he had with her, he was going over the chapter in his mind. When he had it letter-perfect he went to work.

Seduction is like breach of promise. If a man promises a girl he'll marry her, and she believes him, she can sue if he doesn't marry her, as long as she can prove she was damaged by the false promise. Now, breach of promise deals with a social or mental damage, primarily. Seduction deals with a physical damage. If the girl, under the influence of the guy's promise, spends a night with the guy, she can have him arrested for seduction if he doesn't marry her.

Johnny Smith knew all that. Nevertheless, he went right ahead and proposed marriage to Madeline, because he knew one more thing: nobody under twenty-one can make a legal contract (in other words, a promise of any kind). And Johnny was just twenty.

Madeline had fallen under Johnny's spell quickly. He was a tall, dark-haired boy with a big grin, and Madeline wasn't the first girl who'd been impressed by the grin and hadn't considered the kind of guy that lay beneath it. Johnny, on the other hand, saw in Madeline's blonde, eighteen-year-old prettiness another conquest. She was the prettiest girl he'd ever seen; everybody said she was the prettiest girl in town. That was why Johnny decided to play his particularly ugly trick on her.

He went out on double dates with her, at first. Then the two of them started going out alone, in Johnny's car. They "discovered" a little lane that led to the top of a hill. Johnny had used the lane before, with other girls; he'd found that the moonlit view had a definite effect on the emotions.

It had an effect on Madeline, anyhow. She fell hopelessly in love with Johnny. He strung her along for a while, and then he proposed.

She accepted without any hesitation at all.

Then Johnny said: "Let's celebrate. Let's not go home tonight. We'll spend the night in some tourist cabin on the road."

Madeline demurred. Johnny pointed out that it didn't make any difference, that they were going to get married anyway. Madeline asked about her parents.

"Call them and tell them you're spending the night at some girl friend's house. They wouldn't understand," Johnny said.

The promise of marriage was what did it. Madeline called her folks. Then she and Johnny set off, in Johnny's car, for a tourist cabin.

It wasn't until Madeline discovered she was pregnant that she decided to ask a lawyer what to do. He advised her to bring Johnny into court on a charge of seduction. There wasn't too much of a chance without any witnesses to Johnny's promise of marriage, he said, but he'd do what he could. He'd known Madeline since early childhood, and liked her. Now he was out to get Johnny Smith.

In court, Johnny surprised the lawyer. "Sure I promised to marry her," he said.

"And is that the reason she agreed to go to the tourist cabin with you?" the lawyer asked.

"Sure it is."

The lawyer felt sure of victory — until Johnny brought out his ace in the hole.

"My promise wasn't valid. It doesn't mean a thing," Johnny said. "I'm under twenty-one; I can't make a legal promise. You can't hold me to a promise in court."

There were a couple of minutes of silence. Then the lawyer faced the judge.

"Madeline Wells," he said, "believed Johnny Smith's promise. Maybe it wasn't a legal promise, maybe it couldn't be held against him in court. But she didn't know that. Therefore it doesn't make any difference whether the promise was legal or not. The only thing that counts is whether she believed it."

"Ignorance of the law," Johnny stated, "is no excuse."

Who was right?

What's *your* verdict?

**ANSWER:**

The lawyer was right. Courts have ruled that the belief in, rather than the legal validity of, a promise is what counts. Johnny was sent to prison.

# The Pigeons

*There wasn't much to do in the Reformatory, and Hop was happy just watching the pigeons — until Al came along . . .*

**BY HAL ELLSON**

THERE were always pigeons there, winging into the sky or plummeting past the windows of the Boys' Reformatory ward into the unreal distance of the world below. During most of the year the pigeons were birds of passage which nested elsewhere, but when spring came and the windows folded outward, the pigeons founded their nests on the ledges between screen and glass. They seemed to know it was safe,

that the windows would not be closed again until autumn, and that no hand could harm them. The screens were made that way because of the patients, but sometimes, at some of the windows, the noise the patients made disturbed them.

At one of the windows of the Reformatory, where the boys' ward was, two pigeons made a nest for themselves. Hop discovered it. He was a quiet one who never said much, and never played with the other boys. Nothing in the world seemed to interest him, but when the pigeons came he found something exciting. No one would have suspected it to judge by his face or actions; intense interest perhaps, but no more than that.

There was much that others never suspected. The boys thought him dull, not knowing of his vivid imagination. All they saw was one who preferred to keep to himself, one who stared out the windows for hours at a time. They did not know that, while they slept, he crawled from his bed in the deep of the night to watch the river and the traffic on the Drive, for the dark wound of the river fascinated him. Its sounds evoked all sorts of fantasies. The lights on the Drive and the endless traffic gave him entry into another world.

But Hop was considered a dope. After all, he couldn't play ball, and fighting was out of the question. He simply would not and could not fight.

Hop never said a word about the pigeons, keeping their nest secret. But its discovery was inevitable. He himself gave it away by his own attentiveness. His three room-mates were next to know of the nest, one of them coming up behind him and calling the others when he saw the pigeons. "They've got a nest!" Dusty shouted. "The pigeons. . . ."

"Oh, shut up," Hop said, and the three boys stared at him, amazed. "You'll frighten them away," he explained, and his face and eyes became veiled again.

"So that's what you've been watching," Chico whispered, and with that the pigeons took flight from the ledge.

Hop neither answered or looked at the others, his eyes on the empty nest, his thoughts somewhere in that lighter, freer universe where the pigeons were still winging. Behind him the voices of the other boys grew faint as they left the room and moved down the hallway, their voices dying away completely as they turned into the main hall. And now Hop felt lonely, though not for them. His room-mates meant nothing to him. He neither liked or hated them. They were just boys, names, creatures of another world almost, and he felt no need of their friendship. When he had first come to this place he had let them know that, and they had understood, sensing his difference immediately.

Now he waited patiently for the pigeons to return and finally they

did, announcing themselves with a rushing of wings. They landed on the ledge, their bright little eyes recognizing him immediately. Settling down, they began to discuss their household. At least the cock did, and Hop smiled, no longer lonely. A moment later, footsteps alerted him as the nurse came into the room. The pigeons, once more alarmed, scrambled from the ledge and took off.

"So, this is where you are," said the nurse. "Do you know you're not supposed to be here now?"

As Hop turned, he raised his eyes. His face remained bland. He had no desire to answer, for women themselves were odd creatures, hardly real. He trusted none, least of all Miss Adams who asked too many questions. He resented her false friendliness, hated her dominating mannerisms. One glance at her was enough and he walked from the room, wondering what the old stinker would write on his chart today. As he moved down the hall, she passed from his mind and the door banged shut behind him, a key locking it for the rest of the day. That was the hard part of it, for the bedrooms became forbidden territory as soon as the beds were made, the doors remaining closed till after supper hour. And then the pigeons were not always there, for there was a time for flight and a time for finding something to eat.

But Hop was happy now that the pigeons had come. First thing in the morning, he went to the window to watch them and, in the evening after supper, he slipped into the room. In the evening, while it was still light, the pigeons sometimes took off, flinging themselves into the sky. At such time a sudden sadness came over Hop, for he wanted to go with them, wanted to be as free as they were. Sometimes he made believe he flew with them, hurling himself over the parapets of the hospital into the sky where there were no locked door and wire screens.

Before darkness fell the pigeons always came back. At this time there was always a lot of fuss and talk. Not that the hen pigeon said much. She was a quiet one, as hen pigeons are: it was the cock, a sort of bully and braggart, like all cock pigeons, and he strutted and blew out his chest, drumming and demonstrating his love in the manner of all his fore-fathers, until finally they bedded down for the night. It was then that Hop turned away from the window and went out of the room with a lighter feeling inside him.

In the ward no one paid attention to him any longer, but there was another boy, Al, who was always up to something. The smaller boys were his particular prey. From them he demanded tribute, candy, cigarettes and, if he could manage it, their dessert at suppertime. All new boys coming into the ward became his victims, unless they were bigger,

or knew how to fight for their rights. Those who were bigger, or knew how to fight, he was clever enough to make his allies.

Hop was one of the victims. So many cigarettes were demanded — or else. Or else meant a lot of things, and Hop knew what all those things were, so he paid tribute. It was better to pay, for he had seen what had happened to others who refused.

But sometimes when Al was in a bad mood, he demanded a lot of cigarettes. When he saw his leadership wavering, he needed more than an ordinary amount to distribute to his friends. He was clever that way, building up prestige with cigarettes he took from other boys. With Hop he was always demanding, as Hop was a particularly easy mark.

In an ugly mood one evening, Al approached him. "Got any cigarettes?" he asked.

Hop shook his head. "You took the last one after supper," he reminded him.

"I took the last?" Al measured him from head to foot. "Something tells me you're a stinking liar. You're hiding them."

"Honest, I haven't got any."

"Put your arms up," Al said, and when Hop raised his arms, he felt for the cigarettes. Not finding any, he went to Hop's bed and searched it, left it in a mess and turned to Hop again. "Got wised up, didn't you?" he said.

"Honest, I haven't any cigarettes," Hop protested.

"Okay," Al said, smiling. "If you don't want to play ball, that's all right. But wait. Just wait and see. We'll find out if you've got any."

Hop looked worried as Al walked out of the room. It was an hour and a half to bed-time, two hours and a half to lights-out, but nothing happened. Al didn't come near Hop.

At lights-out all the boys were in bed, the ward quiet. Fearing something would happen, Hop didn't fall asleep. At ten he heard naked feet padding in the dark and started to rise. Suddenly someone leaped on him, and a hand clapped over his mouth. Other hands grasped and held him down. Five boys had entered the room. Hop lay still, breathing hard, watching a small eye of light glowing in the dark, the tip of a cigarette. Someone straddled his chest and he couldn't move. The eye of light did. Then Al spoke. He had taken the cigarette from his mouth.

"This is going to be a lesson so you won't forget what you're supposed to remember," he said, and the eye of light came down slowly. The burning cigarette touched Hop's chest. It was taken away and brought down again twice more.

Hop struggled and tried to cry out. At last, when he quieted, the cigarette came down again toward his eyes and stopped.

"If you talk, if you say anything about this, this is what you get tomorrow night," Al warned. "We'll burn out your eyes."

It was over. Al got off him. The others released him. Five dark forms slipped quickly and soundlessly out of the room and disappeared.

In the morning when Dr. Franks called Hop into his office to speak to him, he discovered the cigarette burns and asked how he had gotten them.

Hop shrugged and avoided the doctor's eyes, his hand on his chest now.

"Very strange," said Dr. Franks. "You don't know?"

Hop looked out the window and shook his head.

"Which boys did it? Tell me their names."

"Nobody did it," said Hop, raising his eyes slowly. "I fell asleep while I was smoking and burned myself."

"Oh, I see, you fell asleep three times. That's a new one I've never heard before."

"That's what happened," Hop insisted. "I fell asleep."

Dr. Franks nodded. He knew what had happened, but he also knew it was useless to try to get anything out of Hop. When something like this occurred, no one ever talked, no one ever admitted anything.

As the days passed, Hop continued to pay tribute to Al, making sure he always had cigarettes so nothing would happen again. Most of the time he stayed far away from him and, whenever he could, he stole into his room to watch the pigeons.

Everyone knew about them now, and though three boys slept in the same room with Hop, the pigeons were known as his. Al knew about them too. Sometimes he would go look at them and taunt Hop, saying he intended to eat them. Afraid to say anything, Hop never answered.

One day he discovered an egg in the nest. This excited him, but he said nothing, wanting no one else to know. That very day another boy also discovered the egg and dashed from the room to spread the word.

A group of boys came running into the bedroom. They crowded the window and stared at the egg. Their interest died quickly and they left. Hop remained. He stared at the egg. It was almost dusk now, long blue shadows were lunging across the wide breast of the river. Finally there came a sound of wings, a fluttering, and the familiar cooing on the window ledge.

The pigeons were back, and Hop watched them for a while, till they bedded down and closed their bright little eyes. He went back to his bed and stared at the ceiling, thinking of the little egg under the breast of the hen. Tomorrow there might be another. Soon, at least, there would be one new member added to his family.

Next morning the egg was still there when Hop looked, but the pigeons had gone off. Staring at the egg for a while, Hop walked out of the room. Coming back, he went to the window again only to find the egg gone and the nest disturbed.

There were three boys in the room and they stared at Hop. They said nothing. Hop didn't know how the screen had been opened. But that didn't matter now. The egg was gone. Walking out of the bedroom, he suddenly ran and disappeared somewhere. At breakfast call, they had to search for him. When they found him and brought him to the table, he wouldn't eat or look at anyone.

At the other end of the long table and on the opposite side sat Al. He looked down the length of the table at Hop, a grin on his face. "What's the matter, Hop?" he said. "Your egg disappear?"

Hearing this taunt, Hop raised his eyes.

"The poor little pigeon egg. Do you know who took it? I did. You look so worried I thought you might want to know. I took it and I smashed it. I stamped it flat . . ."

Hop stared at his tormentor, his face white. He stood up. There was a knife at the table, and then it was suddenly in his hand.

Al looked around at the others. He didn't have time to open his mouth before the knife went into him, up and down, and he jerked with it and fell across the table. Blood began to spread on the table.

There was a clatter as the knife fell, then the sound of running footsteps and Hop was gone.

After that nobody did anything or said anything at all until the guards came into the room and went after Hop. The other boys followed them, leaving Al alone on the table.

They found Hop sitting quietly at the window where the empty nest was, waiting for the pigeons to come back.

# The Competitors

*The whole trouble was that there weren't enough people dying. The funeral directors had to think of a way to remedy the situation.*

BY RICHARD DEMING

THE VILLAGE of Shannon wasn't big enough for two funeral parlors, Sam Potter thought morosely. One for each fifteen hundred population. Even if he and Dave continued to get their fair half of the available business, future prospects were gloomy. Particularly since Shannon natives tended to live to such discouraging old age.

This was largely because of the nature of the community, Sam reflected as he

paused in his raking of the already immaculate lawn to examine without pleasure the sedate sign reading: *Potter and Clemson Mortuary.* A sleepy Western New York State village on the shore of Lake Erie, Shannon had no large industries to provide hazardous occupations, so little crime there hadn't been a murder in thirty years, and a disgustingly healthy climate.

If only Harry Averill had been content to stick to the furniture business and hadn't decided, three years back, to branch out into the funeral business also, Sam thought resentfully, he and Dave would still have a comfortable living. After enjoying a monopoly for fifteen years, it was a little hard to see half your business snatched away by a man who already had a way to make a living. Then in grudging fairness Sam had to admit it was Averill's son insisting on studying to be an embalmer which had induced the elder Averill to enter the field, and not pure avarice.

He went back to his raking, a short, round little man in his forties whose normal expression was a benign smile instead of the frown his face now wore.

Dave Clemson came from the funeral home's garage, where he had been tinkering with the engine of the ancient hearse, and walked across the lawn toward Sam. Glad of an excuse, Sam again stopped his raking and leaned on the rake handle as his partner approached.

Dave Clemson was the same age as Sam Potter, also a bachelor, and for business purposes had cultivated an identically benign expression. But there the resemblance ended. Dave was four inches taller than Sam and as thin as a rail.

When he reached Sam, Dave stopped and said in a discouraged voice, "It's no use. She's finally done."

"The hearse?" Sam asked.

"What else?" the thin man snapped at him.

"You don't have to bite my head off," Sam said mildly. "Maybe it's not as bad as you think."

"It's as bad as I think," Dave assured him. "The cylinders are too big now to bore out again, the pistons are warped and the head's almost eaten through. Nothing but a new motor would ever make her run again. Also the transmission's shot and the rear end is ready to go out. After eighteen years, what could you expect?"

Sam asked, "What are we going to do?"

"Either buy a new hearse or fold up."

"A new hearse!" Sam said, appalled. "Where do we get the sixty-five hundred bucks?"

"I figure eighty-five hundred. For a combination hearse and ambulance."

Sam's voice rose to a squeak. "A combination job! What in the devil do we need with an ambulance?"

"I've had it in mind for some

time," Dave said. "Come inside and we'll talk it over."

By tacit agreement they went to the casket display room in the basement, as it was the coolest room in the building. And as always before a business conference, Dave got some ice from the refrigerator in the embalming room, squeezed a couple of the lemons he always kept in the same refrigerator and made two tall glasses of lemonade. Neither man spoke until they were both comfortably seated, had their pipes going and had sampled their drinks.

Then Dave said, "Like I said, I've been thinking this over for some time, Sam. And the way I see it, we're never going to get out of the red waiting for Shannon natives to die."

"So how will spending eighty-five hundred bucks we haven't got help us?"

"We've got to rake up business from outside of Shannon. And that's where the ambulance idea comes in. I been checking up on a few things. You know how many accident calls that broken-down fire-department ambulance made last year?"

The plump man shook his head.

"A hundred and eight," Dave Clemson said in an impressive voice. "Better than two a week."

Sam looked surprised, but not particularly impressed. "So?"

"So I happen to know their ambulance is as close to falling apart as our hearse. The chief plans to go before the common council Monday night and ask for a new one. Suppose we show up too, tell the council we plan to buy a new hearse, and as a public service would just as soon make it a combination ambulance-hearse? Then the village wouldn't need one any more. We could guarantee twenty-four-hour service and charge a set fee. We'd bill patients able to pay, and charge the village for charity cases. I think the common council would jump at it."

Sam looked at his partner in astonishment. Finally he said, "So do I. Look at the money they'd save. But I don't see any profit for us. We couldn't charge more than ten or fifteen dollars a call, and even if we got fifteen dollars, a hundred and eight calls comes to only . . ." He paused to gaze at the ceiling a moment, then said, "Sixteen hundred and twenty dollars a year. And the outfit would cost us two thousand dollars more than a plain hearse. Figuring depreciation . . ."

"You don't get the idea," Dave interrupted. "I don't plan to make any profit from ambulance calls. It's an investment in good will."

Sam examined his partner with an expression indicating he thought the thin man had lost his mind. Instead of answering, he took a long and sarcastic pull on his lemonade.

"Just listen me out," Dave said insistently. "You know what most local ambulance calls are for?"

"Auto accidents, I suppose."

"Almost all of them," Dave agreed.

"Usually involving out-of-town people. Not many Shannon people get hurt in accidents, because they never move fast enough to do more than dent a fender. But an awful lot of tourists passing by town smash up. Since they built the two new highways both sides of town, hundreds of out-of-staters whiz past us every day. And at least a couple a week crack up. I checked with the hospital the other day, and of the hundred and seventy-eight accident victims brought in last year by the hundred and eight ambulance calls I mentioned, thirty-three people were either DOA, or died in the hospital later. But we only got two of those bodies. And of course both those were split fees with the undertaker in the deceaseds' home towns, since neither was from around here."

Sam Potter began to look more interested. "What are you getting at, Dave?"

"I've been doing a lot of thinking about why Harry Averill got thirty-one of those bodies while we only got two. Us being the older firm, you'd think it would be the other way. I finally figured it out."

"How?" Sam asked blankly.

"Just put yourself in the place of the next of kin of an accident victim. Maybe you've rushed in from out of town when the hospital called you, or maybe you were in the accident too, but weren't killed. Maybe you're hurt, maybe not, but at least you're upset, you're not thinking too clearly, and you don't know a soul in town. When the charge nurse at the hospital asks what you want done with the body, what do you do?"

Sam said slowly, "Why, ask the nurse who the undertakers in town are, I guess."

"And does the nurse recommend one?"

"No, of course not. They're not allowed to do that. I suppose she'd give me the names of both funeral homes and let me take my pick."

"Or, more likely, just hand you a phone book opened to the proper page in the classified section."

Sam stared at his partner. "Yeah. And . . ." He stopped and his eyes widened. "My God! I don't know anything about either of them, so naturally I'd take the first one in the book. Averill got all that business simply because his name starts with A!"

"Exactly," Dave said, pleased with his pupil. "Probably the only reason we even got two was becauseAverill's phone was busy or something when the next of kin tried to reach him."

Sam was now so interested, he had allowed his pipe to go out and the ice in his lemonade to melt. Setting the glass on the floor next to his foot, he leaned forward with his elbows on his knees.

"So get back to your good will idea," he said.

"It's simple," Dave said. "With an ambulance, we'd be in on the ground floor. Every time we bring in an accident victim, we leave a

card. If the victim dies, his next of kin isn't going to look in any phone book. He's going to phone those nice, sympathetic ambulance attendants who did everything possible to save the victim's life by rushing him to the hospital, and who also happen to run a funeral home."

Sam regarded his thin partner with admiration. "We'd get all of them," be breathed. "Over thirty a year." He paused, then went on reflectively, "Of course some of them would just be embalmings, because some families would want their home town undertakers to handle details." Then he brightened. "But at least half ought to buy caskets from us."

"At least," Dave agreed. "And tourists are quite likely to have money. I happen to know Averill unloaded a fifteen-hundred-dollar casket in one of the thirty-one accident fatalities he got last year."

"Eighty-five hundred dollars for a combination job," Sam Potter said with a faraway look in his eyes. "We could mortgage the funeral home . . ."

When word got around the village that Potter and Clemson had taken over the responsibility for furnishing ambulance service for the community, Harry Averill used the rumor as an excuse to needle his competitors a little. The incident occurred at the weekly luncheon meeting of the Shannon Businessmen's Club.

Harry Averill was a bland, portly man of about fifty, and had once been regarded as a good friend by both Sam Potter and Dave Clemson. During the past three years, ever since Averill's son Harry Jr. had graduated from a New York City embalmer's school and the elder Averill had added the funeral business to his already thriving furniture business, their relations remained the same on the surface, but underneath there was the bitterness of business rivals. This particular luncheon meeting Averill made a point of sitting directly across the table from the two partners.

He deliberately waited until mealtime conversation had subsided somewhat, then said in a friendly voice, but one which carried from one end of the table to the other, "Hear you fellows are buying an ambulance."

"Combination ambulance-hearse," Sam Potter said. "Matter-of-fact, it arrived this morning."

Averill beamed. "Probably a wise move. Ambulance fees will help carry you over rough spots when the funeral business is bad."

Both partners beamed back as genially as their competitor was beaming.

Dave Clemson said in a loud voice, "We don't even hope to break even on ambulance calls. It's just a service to the community."

"Well, that's certainly civic-minded of you boys," Averill said in an equally loud voice. "When

I heard you were going in for additional revenue because your business had slipped, I knew it was just a malicious rumor."

"We're getting along fine," Sam Potter said in a comfortable tone which effectively hid his rage.

It took Harry Averill a full two months to discover the effect the new ambulance service was having on his business. During that time there were four automobile accident deaths at the local hospital, but Averill didn't get a single one. But when he finally realized what was happening, he took action to correct the situation at once.

He dropped the news in the partners' laps like a bombshell at a meeting of the Businessmen's Club.

"Got a new hearse yesterday," he announced casually. "Combination ambulance-hearse, like yours."

Only eighteen years in a business where public relations demanded an ability to control facial expression prevented the partners from gaping at him in consternation. Instead they both managed to look delighted.

"Shannon will have better ambulance service than most cities," Sam Potter remarked with a wide grin.

But when they got back to the funeral home, neither partner felt it necessary to conceal his gloom from the other.

"We're licked," Sam said. "Jimmy Straight, the Hose One pump truck driver, is Averill's brother-in-law. Every call that comes into the fire department will be relayed on to him instead of to us."

"Yeah," Dave said dispiritedly. Then he brightened. "On the other hand, Tommy Johnson on the night desk at the police station is my cousin. I think I can fix it to have *us* called first by the police."

This information cheered Sam a little. "Then at least we'll have an even break," he said thoughtfully. "It'll just be a question of which ambulance can get to the scene first.

That was the way it worked out. Since the police station and the fire department had a joint switchboard, both learned about automobile accidents simultaneously. And as a result the two funeral homes learned of them simultaneously. During the next few weeks both ambulances roared to every accident scene.

But since in no case were there more than three victims requiring hospitalization as a result of any one accident, and each ambulance was equipped to handle up to three stretcher cases, one ambulance always returned home empty. Neither managed to gain an edge, each garnering roughly half the available business.

At the end of six weeks Harry Averill made a visit to the Potter and Clemson Mortuary. He caught the partners in the act of laying out an elderly woman who had tried to pass a semi-trailer on a hill.

"Competent looking job so far," Averill commented judiciously. "Though Harry Jr. would be a better judge of that than me. He handles all this end of the business, you know, while I work out front."

Neither partner felt as constrained to be polite to their competitor in private as they did in public. Sam Potter said with a trace of condescension, "We know you're not an embalmer," and Dave Clemson asked bluntly, "What do you want?"

"Thought it time we had a little business discussion," Averill said. "Did you know the whole village is beginning to talk about our races to accident scenes?"

Both partners looked at him. They not only knew it, they had worriedly discussed the possible effect such bad publicity might have on both funeral homes.

But all Sam Potter said was, "So?"

"So up to now people just think it's funny. They just think we're competing for ambulance fees. It hasn't occurred to anyone that we're also trying to line up . . ." He paused, discarded the phrase he had started to use and changed it to, "Trying to create good will."

When Sam and Dave merely continued to look at him, Averill coughed delicately. "It occurred to me that if the general public ever suspects our . . . ah . . . good will reason for rushing to accident scenes, people might consider it a trifle ghoulish."

The partners looked at each other, then went back to work. Sam carefully injected a little paraffin into the withered left cheek of the corpse, rounding it out prettily. As he moved to the other cheek, Dave lightly touched the left one with rouge.

"In a town this small, that sort of talk could ruin both of us," Averill said.

Sam asked bluntly, "What you driving at?"

"I suggest we split the business. You fellows take all calls one week, we'll take them the next. That way we won't be going out on unnecessary calls, there won't be any danger of talk and, best of all, we'll each only be on twenty-four-hour call half the time. I don't imagine you fellows like having to stick near a phone all the time any more than I do."

Sam and Dave silently continued working on the corpse for some minutes. Finally Dave said, "I think he's got a point, Sam."

"I guess so," Sam said reluctantly. "Maybe we ought to try it at least for awhile."

Neither partner mentioned to Harry Averill that they had discussed going to him with the identical proposition.

For the next six months the cooperative agreement between Averill's Funeral Home and the Potter and Clemson Mortuary

worked without friction. On alternate weeks the combination ambulance-hearses of each rushed to accident scenes alone. And while some weeks the traffic toll was heavier than others, over a period of time each made approximately the same number of trips.

However, when Dave Clemson made one of the statistical studies he was so fond of at the end of the six months, his findings upset him.

"We've had twenty-four calls in six months," he told Sam. "Averill's had twenty-seven. We brought in forty-nine people and he only brought in forty. In every case where a victim from out of town died, the next of kin called the funeral home whose ambulance brought the deceased to the hospital."

"Sounds fair enough to me," Sam said.

"But out of his forty people, twelve of Averill's died. Only seven of our forty-nine did. He got five more embalmings than we did."

"It'll work out even over the years," Sam assured him. "Next six months we'll probably get more embalmings than Averill."

"We better," Dave said darkly. "Even with this extra tourist business, we're barely keeping up payments on that eighty-five hundred loan. If things get *worse* instead of better, we're sunk."

But things didn't get worse. Fortunately for the shaky financial status of the mortuary, Sam Potter's prophecy came true. During the next six months, despite ambulance calls being fairly evenly split, only five of those accident victims brought in by Averill died, while eighteen delivered to the hospital by Sam and Dave expired.

"See?" Sam said, when Dave had reported to him the results of his semi-annual statistical study. "Now we're eight embalmings ahead of Averill." Then his face turned gloomy. "Which means the percentages are we'll drop way down during the next six months."

But this time Sam's prophecy was not correct, for the partners' luck held for the whole of the next six-month period. The accident victims they rushed to the hospital continued to die with much more gratifying frequency than those brought in by Averill.

By now the partners' procedure on emergency calls had settled into a routine. On the way to accident scenes Dave Clemson invariably drove. Coming back Sam Potter always drove while his thin partner sat in back with the patients. After delivering their cargoes to the hospital, they switched again and Dave drove home.

This might have gone on indefinitely without change had it not been for Sam Potter mistaking a car seat cushion for a body one dark night.

The call came in about eleven P.M., reporting a bad accident on

the main highway about two miles beyond town. Within three minutes they were roaring to the scene with the siren wide open.

When they approached the accident scene, the first thing the partners saw was a ditched semi-trailer with a cluster of people gathered about it, then an overturned sedan fifty yards beyond. As usual Dave was driving, and since from previous experience he knew that in arguments between semis and passengers cars it was normally the occupants of the passenger car who were most in need of attention, he slid by the semi and brought the ambulance to a stop near the sedan.

A large number of cars had stopped, and so many curious on-lookers were wandering around, it was impossible to determine which, if any, group surrounded an injured person. As Sam slid out of the right-hand side of the ambulance, he spotted a seat cushion lying in the ditch near the overturned sedan, and in the dark mistook it for a body.

As the cushion was still some yards beyond where the ambulance had halted, Sam ran around the front of the vehicle instead of the rear. But when he reached a point near the left front fender, he saw his mistake and turned to look for Dave. Then he saw that Dave had stopped the ambulance right next to an injured man lying on the shoulder, and was already pulling open the rear doors.

Reversing himself, Sam rushed back along the left side of the vehicle, catching his shoulder sharply on the side-view mirror as he passed. It gave him a painful bruise, but in the flurry of helping Dave load the injured man into the ambulance he forgot about it.

There was only one injured person, and he was unconscious. As always Sam Potter drove to the hospital while Dave sat in back with the patient. They had almost reached the village line before Sam grew conscious of his shoulder aching. Then he remembered bumping the side-view mirror and glanced at it reproachfully.

The ambulance's siren had pulled all other traffic to the sides of the road, but one truckman had neglected to dim his highway lights. Just as Sam glanced at the sideview mirror, the ambulance interior was flooded with light. And to his surprise Sam noted that his jostling the mirror had turned it so that he had a full view of the back.

Then his surprise changed to horror as he saw the reflection of his partner's raised arm. What looked like a small blackjack was in Dave's hand. In the momentary illumination Sam saw it descend in a vicious arc onto the already injured head of their passenger.

Sam was so shocked by what he had seen, it didn't even occur to him to demand an explanation from Dave. With his mind in a turmoil, he roared on to the hospital.

He said nothing to Dave as they carried the stretcher inside, nor anything while they waited outside the door of the emergency room for the doctor's verdict.

He continued to remain silent when the doctor came out and announced laconically, "DOA." The doctor handed Dave a wallet and said, "Seems to be plenty of identification in there."

While Dave counted the money and wrote out a receipt which he gave the charge nurse, Sam thought over the appalling sight he had seen. He examined his partner carefully, but could detect nothing in his manner indicating a guilty conscience.

Prior to the advent of the new ambulance service, it had been the chief nurse's duty to contact accident victims' next of kin, but since both Averill and Clemson and Potter had volunteered to take this unpleasant task off her shoulders for cases they brought in, she had gladly relinquished the responsibility. Now Sam had another wait while Dave made a long-distance call from the superintendant's office.

Sam didn't go in with him. He didn't want to listen to his partner's sympathetic voice as he broke the news, nor to his respectful explanation that it was the Potter and Clemson Ambulance Service and Mortuary calling. Particularly he didn't want to hear Dave's question as to what disposition the next of kin wanted made of the body.

He still had not spoken to Dave when they returned to the ambulance. By force of habit he climbed in the right side of the cab, as he always did when they left the hospital, leaving the driver's seat for Dave. The first thing Dave did was glance at the side-view mirror.

Looking puzzled, Dave reached through the window to straighten it, then paused and carefully studied its present angle. When he saw it gave a full view of the rear, he gave Sam a quick sideglance.

Sam nodded his head and said in a dispirited voice, "I saw it."

Dave made no comment, merely starting the engine and driving away. But several times during the short trip home he glanced surreptitiously at his partner. Even in the dark Sam could tell that the thin man's face was pale.

When they pulled into the garage, Dave could stand the suspense no longer. "What are you going to do, Sam?" he asked in a slightly high voice.

"I'm going to think awhile before I do anything," Sam said heavily.

He climbed out of the cab and made straight for the casket display room, leaving Dave to close the garage doors alone. When Dave came down a few moments later, Sam was seated with his pipe going and was staring off into space.

Dave's face was now very pale. After watching Sam hesitantly for a minute or two, he disappeared into the embalming room. Five

minutes later he returned with two glasses of lemonade. Sam accepted one mutely and waited until Dave had his pipe going before he spoke.

Then he said, "This wasn't the first one, was it, Dave?"

Without looking at him, Dave shook his head.

"We've been averaging two to one over Averill," Sam said.

"Maybe they'd all have died anyway," Dave said in a low voice.

Sam looked at him steadily until Dave said in a defensive tone, "It's paid off the hearse and got us back on our feet. Without all those extra cases, we'd be bankrupt by now."

Sam drew thoughtfully on his pipe. "There's that, of course," he conceded.

He continued to puff his pipe for some minutes. Finally he took it from his mouth and drained a quarter of his lemonade.

"If I called the police," he said reflectively, "I guess the business would be finished. Even if they electrocuted you and cleared me, the mortuary would never survive such a scandal."

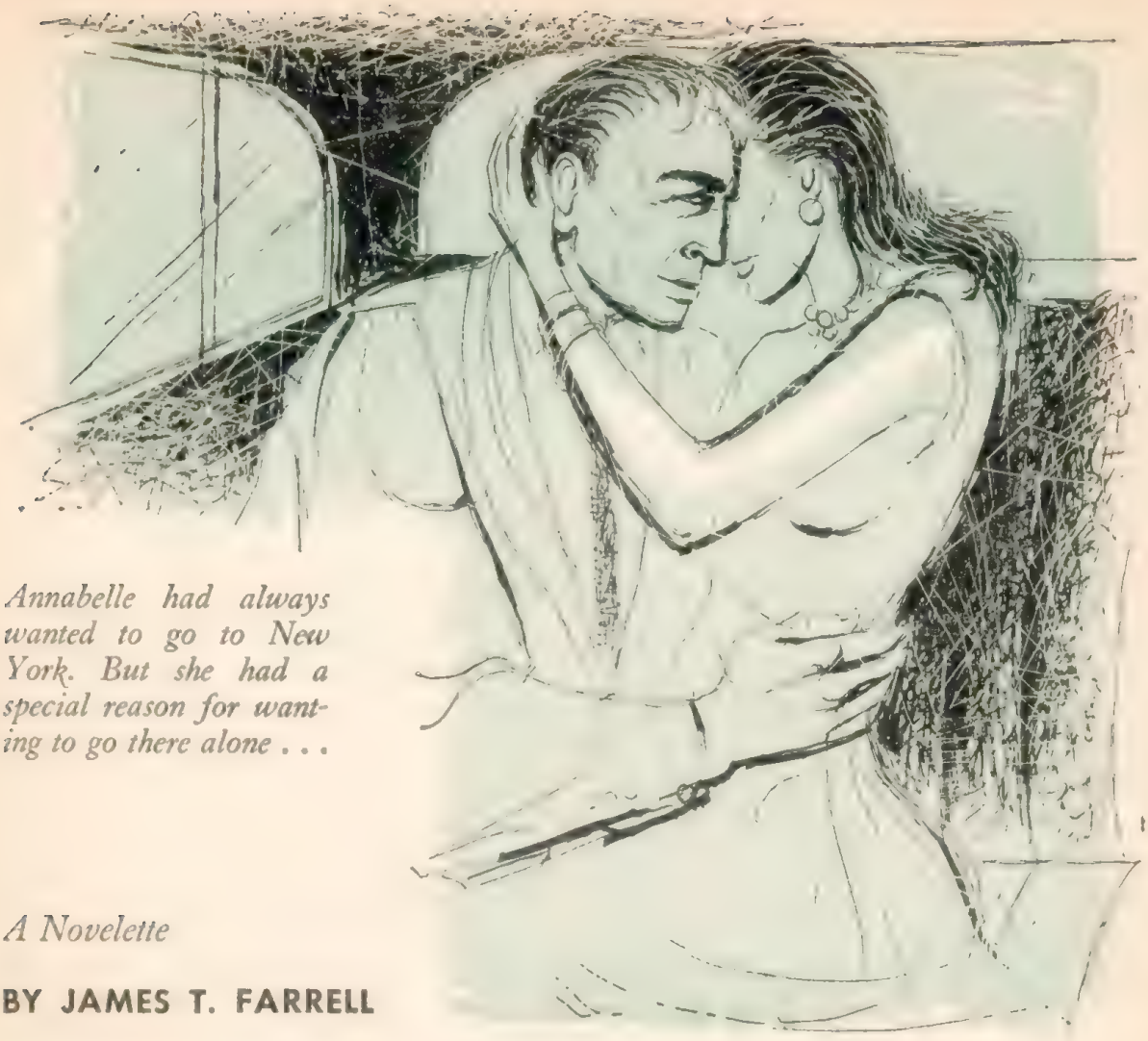
Dave said nothing.

"Maybe they *would* all have died anyway," Sam said.

Dave said with a faint note of relief, "Of course they would have, Sam."

Sam drained the rest of his lemonade and tapped some of the ashes from his pipe to make it draw better. In a brisk tone he said, "I guess the best thing to do is change our procedure a little. You shouldn't have all the responsibility. Hereafter I'll ride in back half the time."

He looked up and met Dave's eyes. The two men smiled at each other.



*Annabelle had always wanted to go to New York. But she had a special reason for wanting to go there alone . . .*

*A Novelette*

**BY JAMES T. FARRELL**

# Rendezvous

ARTHUR and Annabelle had gone to college together. They had been good friends in college, nothing more. Arthur, as a student, had been lacking in self-confidence, and had not been at all aware of the attraction of his personality, the power of his mind, and the appeal he had to others, especially to girls. Annabelle had seemed to him to be both a beautiful and an intelligent girl. At times, when they were both at dances or parties, he would feel a desire for her, but he never knew how to act upon it. He was checked by his own timidity. He was afraid to make his desire known to Annabelle, afraid of rejection. So they had been merely friends in college.

Annabelle was tall, dark and stately. She was both handsome and healthy-looking. She had a frank face and manner, dark eyes which shone and sparkled, a well-formed face, and a shapely, if rather large, figure. She was very popular, well-liked and gay in the company of others. Her parents had both died, and she had been raised by an uncle. She was deeply attached to the memory of her father, spoke of him often, and believed that, had he lived, he would have been a great man. He had been a very successful lawyer and, also, he had been cultivated. He had read much, gone to plays, enjoyed music and painting. He had been extremely fond of his daughter, had played with her when she was a tot, had often taken her out on walks, to the zoo, on expeditions about Chicago. His death, which came suddenly as a result of a heart attack, had almost shattered her. For over a year, she had been a meek little girl, secretly believing that she had, in some way, been responsible for his death.

She couldn't remember her mother well. Her mother had died when she was five. Annabelle recalled her as a tall and rather nervous woman who had sometimes fondled her, and sometimes ignored her. Annabelle had actually been raised by a kindly old lady, hired as a housekeeper by her father. This old lady, Mrs. Norman, was a widow, and had raised a family and buried three husbands. She was big and firm and superstitious and authoritative, but Annabelle had loved her. Then, upon the death of her father, she had gone to live with her Uncle Allan, a kindly, but meek, rich business man. She grew up in a kindness of neglect. She had great freedom, and was allowed out on dates when she was fifteen. She had had several experiences with boys, and one with a business associate of her uncle, all by the time that she was eighteen.

In college, she had two boy friends, one a young fellow who smoked a pipe, wore tweeds, sported a slouch hat, and was heralded as a promising young writer. The other was a basketball player, a tall, fine-looking blondish lad who was kindly, gentle and unsophisticated. Many others tried to attract her, but she was always able to take care of herself. She was somewhat brisk in manner, a fair student, and had literary tastes that ran towards newer and modern writers. She refused to join a club, and was inclined to associate with the more bohemian students. She tried acting in the campus theatrical group and, while she was told that she was very promising, she didn't believe this, and abandoned any hopes or dreams of a career as an actress. She wrote a few mediocre poems, one of which was published in a local magazine. Then, she realized that she was not a poet. By the time she was graduated, she had decided that she was not the type to have a career, and thought that

marriage, on comfortable terms, would be the most satisfying way in which she could spend her life. But at that time, she did not want to have children. She wanted a gay and sophisticated married life, crowded with affairs, with parties, bridge, dances, trips, teas and the like.

Annabelle married Benny Hedges, a famous football player from a Big Ten university, a youth whose exploits had been heralded nationally in the press, and who had been responsible for his school winning the Big Ten Conference title. He seemed to be not only a great athlete, but also intelligent. He had made Phi Beta Kappa, read literature, and was, or seemed to be, more than an athlete. When they married, their friends commented on the appearance of the bride and groom, both tall, handsome and looking so healthy. But the marriage had been a miserable failure. Annabelle's husband was shallow, and had been spoiled by his fame and his college success. He coached for a year, but was let out. He drifted about from job to job, working as a salesman, as an advertising copywriter and as a high-school gridiron official. He took to drinking rather heavily, became fat and bloated, and at home he constantly demanded attention. He liked to stand before her and elicit admiration.

She had decided to leave him before he was killed in an accident after he had gotten drunk at an old grad meeting. Driving recklessly, he had smashed into a truck, and his body had been mangled. Annabelle wasted no tears on her dead husband. She had come to feel that he was no good. She had already made up her mind to leave him.

Soon afterward, she had married an ambitious young lawyer named Harry Torenson. She seemed happy with him. He was struggling to get ahead on his own, but his family had money and their life was comfortable and easy. Of the plodding type, he was considerate, honest, fair in his dealings, and devoted to Annabelle. He never mentioned her first marriage, and showed no jealousy of the famous Benny Hedges. They went out a great deal, and spent weekends in the country near Chicago. In winter, they liked to go up to a cabin owned by Harry's brother, to walk in the snow, drink, or sit watching the log fire. They seemed to be a happy couple.

Harry slowly developed his own practice. He became a moderately successful but unspectacular lawyer. As the years passed, and they both grew into their thirties, he became dull and predictable. He was always sweet, always considerate. Although he seemed to want children, he deferred to Annabelle's wishes, and they had no children. Annabelle became bored and restless. She went away on several vacations to New York, to California, and to Florida. Each time, she went, hoping to have some romantic love affair, but she

had none. She was afraid. On each of these vacations, she danced with men and allowed them to kiss her, but at the final moment, she would evade them, slip out of their arms, refuse them.

She returned from each vacation, looking wonderful in a physical sense, seeming young and healthy and as full of energy as ever. But inwardly, she was growing more and more dissatisfied with herself, and she was secretly beginning to resent her husband. She resented him doubly because she believed that he had trapped her with his sweetness and fairness, his trust and loyalty. He was just too goddamned good. And she decided that she wasn't good.

Her marriage had become empty. She could not face the decision of telling Harry. She began to feel guilty towards him, as though she had betrayed him. And she developed a sense of insincere responsibility towards him. She believed that he depended on her, totally, and that if she were to be unfaithful to him, and worse, to leave him, he would be crushed. He might even never get over it.

She had a maid, and they had a big apartment. She had little to do. Sometimes, she cooked, and as often as they stayed home for dinner, they went out. She didn't particularly like movies, but she saw many of them in the afternoons, just because she couldn't think of any way to occupy her time. And she was given more and more to dreaming of illicit love affairs. How convenient it would be. She could have her lover come to her in the afternoons. There was no danger. Harry was always at the office. She felt that she needed an experience such as this in order to restore to her her sense of life. She felt chained. She didn't love Harry, but she respected him. He was kind and simple, trusting, and he was able to provide her with an easy life.

She didn't know what to do. It was depressing to think not only of spending the rest of her life with him, but also of being loveless, and of never being held in the arms of any other man.

She had opportunities, but she was always frightened off. She always drew back when it came for her to say yes or no. And because she did, she began to look down on many men. Why did they take no for an answer? Why didn't they demand yes? Why didn't they keep insisting and persisting until she was overpowered, until she lost all reason and swooned into their arms? Men were a bad breed. They were not really lovers. And she wanted a lover.

2.

Often, she would think of Arthur. Some time or other, she knew that she would meet him again. She was convinced of that. He would come to Chicago, or she would manage a trip to New York, and he would be

there, and they would meet, and perhaps then, then she would be held by him and kissed by him. She had always been attracted to him. But he had been shy. He had not seemed to realize that she had liked him, had felt drawn to him. Of all the boys she had known back in her 'teens, she was inclined to believe that she respected him the most. On a number of occasions, they had sat together in the Coffee Shop, had walked on the campus or sat on the Midway, talking, but he had never made a move. They had treated each other as good friends, and as nothing else. Maybe if she had known how to give him encouragement, something might have happened. But perhaps it was all for the best, because if it had happened then, it might be washed out now. As it was she could dream and hope and imagine a meeting, a rendezvous.

She often thought of him. He had become a successful newspaperman with a by-line for a New York paper. What had that done to him? She often speculated on this question. He must be different, she reasoned. He must now be experienced in every possible way, and sophisticated. He must have had many women. He was married and had a family. So she had heard. Was he happy? Did he ever think of her? What was he like?

One day, bored, frustrated by her own daydreams and reveries, glumly looking forward to spending the long evening with Harry, she dropped Arthur a note. She then pretended that he would not answer it. But she believed that he would. In the note, she said that she might be coming to New York, and that if she did, and for the sake of *auld lang syne*, she had thought she might look him up. In a few days, she received a brief but friendly answer, asking her by all means to look him up if she came to New York.

The first idea she had had of making such a trip had come to her as she had dashed off the note. But now, she decided that she would make the trip. She was certain that Harry would be agreeable. Yet she became diffident and fearful. She did not want him to suspect anything, though she knew that there was nothing to suspect, nothing but her intentions. She became fearful that she might give herself away, and she tried to seem more ardent than ever, and she was otherwise attentive to him. Especially when they were in public together, or when they had friends at their home, she put on the act of being a loving and happy wife. Still she delayed suggesting that she take the trip.

She couldn't understand herself why she did. She woke up several mornings in succession, planning to broach the subject to Harry, but each time she failed, losing her nerve and just not doing it. Then, she began to tell him that she was getting bored and restless and becoming nervous. He suggested that she find

things to do, join a club, read more, and she agreed to do this, but didn't. She was maneuvering Harry into agreeing that she take a trip alone to New York. Her dreams, her fantasies, her desires, which she couldn't fulfill, troubled her, perhaps even more than they might have if she had actually had any affairs.

Then, suddenly, one morning at breakfast, she told Harry that she thought a trip to New York and a chance to see the new shows and to buy a few things would be good for her. Harry agreed.

3.

Annabelle took the Twentieth Century to New York to stay for one week. Passionately kissing Harry goodbye at the La Salle Street Station, she kept hoping that something would happen to her, that she would have the romantic experience which she believed that she needed. And, since she had written to Arthur, she looked forward to seeing him. On the train, she imagined, also, that she might meet someone, perhaps a movie actor. But then, she guessed that movie actors now took planes. She would have gone by plane had she not been afraid to.

The train ride was disappointing. She met no romantic males. She had brought along three contemporary novels which her friends were talking about, but she was too restless to read. She sat in the club car, hoping that someone would talk to her, but nothing happened. And then, she sat in her roomette, moodily looking out of the window at the night outside. She slept badly. She was glad to get off the train and, in great excitement, she took a cab to the hotel at which she was staying.

But, once in her hotel room, she became lost and lonely, and felt fatigued. She was now on her trip, the trip on which she had worked for some weeks. Now she was in a position to have the experiences she craved. She was afraid. She had a whole week in which to do only what she wanted. This, also, frightened her. And maybe, she thought, looking at herself in the mirror and imagining that she looked tired, maybe she would just seem like one more provincial in sophisticated New York. And if she did have the experiences she wanted, maybe it would break up her marriage with Harry, and Harry would be crushed. Maybe this would all end in tragedy.

She didn't want to have a tragedy or a mess on her hands. She didn't want to hurt Harry. But she was free for one week.

Annabelle decided to take a bath and a rest and, then, she would be in better shape and could plan what she would do.

4.

Arthur was pleased when Annabelle phoned him. He remembered her rather warmly. He had always

liked her and, on and off through the years, he had sometimes reflected on how he might have made love to her if he had tried. He had been shy in those days, and a girl like Annabelle had seemed to him to be too sophisticated, too smart for him. He wouldn't have dared to make a pass at her. He wouldn't have known how. Since then, he had learned.

But he had no great regrets because of his past shyness. He was contented with his life, and more or less satisfied with what he was doing. If he and Annabelle had married, his life would have been different. His wife, Helene, was a quiet and easy-going woman, a good wife and mother. She didn't ask him too many questions, didn't suspect his occasional philanderings and affairs, affairs which he saw as practically inevitable in the kind of work he did. And she was the mother of his two girls. He was fond of the girls, and if he had married any one other than Helene, he would not have been the father of these two fine and beautiful kids.

He had worked hard, had gotten good breaks, and had had an interesting and comfortable life. At thirty-seven, he was confident of himself, and ambitious. He had a future. He was too old for the draft and, if worst came to worst, he would always be able to angle himself a war correspondent's job. This would give him greater opportunity, and it might set him off to writing a book. He had always wanted to write a book, but had never gotten around to doing it. Someday, he would. He was reasonably confident of that.

He was tallish, youthful-looking, dark-haired and clean-cut. He dressed neatly, walked with a brisk and confident air, was well-liked, got on easily with people, was respected by his colleagues and superiors, and took great pride in seeing his name as a by-line name, day after day in the newspapers. He considered himself to be a first-rate newspaperman, and was proud of himself and of his profession.

He had gotten that note from Annabelle, and it had pleased him. He recalled that he had dashed off an answer, and once or twice had imagined her coming to New York, and then it had dropped out of his mind. Her phone call had also pleased him.

Her voice on the phone sounded young and friendly. He was glad she had called. She got him at a time when he was free for lunch. He liked to lunch with someone, and this would be pleasant. Always in his college days, he had found her friendly. They would talk about the old days, he would impress her with the way that he had developed, and he would learn about what had happened to old friends. Also, he would learn about what had happened to Annabelle. And who knew, perhaps . . . He was not amiss to a little adventure. In fact, it would be charming, and novel, and he

would like it. Such adventures were like renewals of life and youth to him. In odd moments, he would occupy himself in remembering them with pleasure. He drew confidence in himself from these memories. Adventures like this went with the idea he had of his personality, and they proved to him that he led an interesting life.

So, he and Annabelle met for lunch. He took her to a restaurant downtown, near the office. He was known there. It was old, and had an air of the early 1900's about it. He thought that this would impress her.

When they had met in front of the restaurant, they looked at one another curiously, and then they smiled. Each was satisfied with the looks of the other. The years had not, as yet, aged them, nor written any signs of damage on their faces. Then, smiling and shaking his hand, Annabelle said:

"The least you could do is to give an old friend a chaste kiss."

"Of course, darling, but it must be chaste. I'm a married man, you know."

He kissed the cheek she held up to him. They went inside. He was greeted as a regular customer by the head waiter. They were ushered to a chair in a corner.

"This is a rather pleasant place," he said. "I like it and come here often."

"Yes, it is. Is it a haunt of newspapermen?"

"Well, a few come here." He looked around. "I don't see any here today."

She was smiling.

"Were you surprised when I wrote you that note?"

"Yes, but it was a happy surprise. And you're a bigger surprise than your note was. You look so young and charming."

"Thank you, Arthur, you always were a darling, even if you didn't know it."

"Now that we have, as old friends, exchanged compliments, let's have a drink to celebrate. What'll you have?"

She looked at the wine card which the waiter had set before them, couldn't make up her mind, looked at it a second time and, after he had ordered a dry martini for himself, she also chose a dry martini.

"Now," Arthur said, leaning across the table, "tell me, Annabelle, are you as happy as you look?"

She hesitated a moment. Then she said:

"Yes."

However, her reply was not convincing, and Arthur mentally took note of this.

"I was saying, I was thinking of our college days, and naturally I remembered you."

"How kind of you," he said.

"Arthur, we were good friends, weren't we?"

"Yes, we were. We liked one another, rather."

"Arthur," she said, smiling broadly,

"you didn't know then how attractive you were. Girls liked you much more than you thought. You were so studious and quiet."

"I was shy."

"That was what made you so attractive."

"If I had only known," he said with a mock sigh.

"What would you have done?"

"Taken advantage of my shyness."

"You've changed. You're sophisticated and successful now."

"Well, I've lived so many years, and gotten on. I guess I can say that I haven't done badly."

"Done badly? How modest. Why, you're an outstanding newspaperman, aren't you?"

"I'm in a good spot."

"It makes me feel proud, because I knew you when."

The waiter brought them their drinks, and then they ordered. Arthur next lifted his glass, and said:

"What'll I toast. You? To you, Annabelle, and may you go on looking as young and happy as you do."

"Thank you, Arthur. Let's drink to us . . . We're old friends, aren't we?"

"To us."

They drank.

5.

They enjoyed lunch, and talked easily. She didn't know what had happened to a number of their old friends, but she told him all that she knew and he did the same. They reminisced about college, about classes, dances, dates, talks, humorous incidents they recalled. It was very pleasant. Annabelle had three more drinks, which, she told him several times, was more than her usual quota. She was doing this because after all, it was a vacation for her. Then, she smiled, and added that, when she thought about it, Arthur was one of her oldest friends.

Arthur had a few drinks. He was comfortable, content and flattered by Annabelle's friendliness. He was thoroughly enjoying himself. Luncheons like this were one of the pleasures of life. And this one was a charming surprise. He and Annabelle slipped right into their old rapport.

They lunched and talked for two hours. But then Arthur had to leave. He promised to phone her at her hotel.

He phoned her a day later. He was free and alone for the evening. His wife was having a group of women friends over for bridge and he usually stayed out on such nights. He detested bridge.

They went to dinner, and walked about New York talking. At ten-thirty, she said that she was tired of walking, and they had a drink. They were some distance from her hotel, and took a cab. He put his arm around her. She turned her face up to him. He kissed her, and she was responsive. They hugged and

kissed until they reached the front of her hotel. Then, she got panicky.

"I'll come up with you," he said.

"Please, no, not tonight, Arthur."

"Why? It's been so pleasant. I always liked you."

"And I always liked you."

"Well, dearest, why not . . ."

But he kissed her goodnight, and left disappointed.

6.

That had been a Friday night. He didn't see her again until lunch on Monday. In the meantime, he had determined that they would have an affair. His two meetings with Annabelle, and the kissing in the taxicab had brought to his mind that fact that he was more bored with his home life and his wife than he realized. And also, he began to think that he had always been much more fond of Annabelle than he had realized. He began even to imagine that, back in his college days, he had been in love with her, and that, if he had only known this and not been so shy, she might have been the girl he married.

He kept thinking of her. He had been disappointed when she had left him on Friday night and dashed into the hotel, and then he had been uncomfortable and had felt frustrated. He had immediately begun imagining what he would do the next time that he met her.

This had happened to him before. But it seemed that he was more stricken this time than on such other occasions. It might be, he reasoned with himself, that Annabelle represented to him something that he had not been able to fulfill and gratify in his youth, and that he needed now to make up for this lack. He was inclined to think that this was why he was so unexpectedly taken with her and why the time until he would next see her seemed to him to be so long and so empty.

All of the next day, he was restless. He couldn't concentrate on the book he was reading. He was bored with his children. He half-listened to his wife. He wanted to see Annabelle. In the afternoon, he went out, phoned her hotel, and was disappointed to learn that she was out. He went to a movie so that he would not keep thinking of her.

He came out of the movie feeling foolish. Walking home, he told himself that he was a damned fool, and that this was merely a passing itch and infatuation. He was rather quiet during dinner, thinking of Annabelle. They had guests in after dinner, and it took him some time and three drinks to get warmed up and to forget Annabelle for a while.

When he got up on Sunday morning he told himself what the hell, if things were going to end in a general catastrophe, as the papers told him, he might as well see her again.

On Sunday morning, he always took his two girls out for a walk. He enjoyed it and, for them, it was a very big occasion.

Joan, the oldest, was eight, and Patsy was five. Joan was more outgoing, had dark hair, and a pretty little round face. Patsy was light-haired, thin, and somewhat tense. They clambered up on his lap, almost upsetting his coffee, and preventing him from reading his paper.

"Daddy, get ready," Joan said in a commanding voice.

"Daddy, get ready," Patsy said in imitation of her older sister.

"Let Daddy have his breakfast," he said.

"No!" Joan said positively.

Her sister imitated Joan.

Arthur smiled. But he wished that, this morning, he didn't have to take them out. And then, he wondered what Annabelle had been like when she had been five, and eight . . .

"All right. Let Daddy finish this cup of coffee. He'll shave and take a bath and take you both out."

"One cup of coffee," Joan said.

Her sister repeated this.

He gulped down his coffee. He went to take his bath.

He heard his daughters outside the bathroom, gaily talking.

"Mommy," Joan was saying, "Mommy, I want my pretty new blue ribbon for my walk with my Daddy."

Arthur was both charmed and guilty. God, he told himself, he could never risk breaking up the family, not with two such girls as these. He asked himself whether Joan would understand it if he had affairs now and then. Would she be forgiving? He wished that he could tell her. He knew that he dared not. If he could, it would all be so simple.

7.

It was such a joy, taking the girls out. Why should Helene now and then complain about taking care of them? But then, come to think of it, Helene didn't complain very much. And yes, it was and would have to be different if you took them out, watched them and cared for them all of the time. But women got more out of motherhood than a man did out of fatherhood.

It was sunny out. It seemed as if the air was shining. And the Sunday morning spirit, pervading the street, the air, the walk and the appearance of people, relaxed him. Before the kids had come, he and Helene had used to lie in bed on Sunday mornings. It used to be one of their best times for love-making. It seemed, come to think of it, that love-making was not the same since the kids had come. Was this true, also, for Helene? Did she feel it?

The girls walked on either side of him, clinging to his hand, and when one of them talked, the other interrupted. He was faced with a barrage of questions and bids for attention from both of them.

There had been the dispute as to which side each of them would take, and he finally had settled it with Joan walking on the outside

and Patsy on the inside. Then, they both talked at once. Joan was prim and well-behaved, and looked down on her sister. As she talked, she was trying to tell her Daddy that she was older than her sister, smarter, and that he should know this.

"Daddy, Daddy, talk to me. Talk to me," Patsy said.

"I'll talk to both of you," he answered.

"Me, me," Patsy said demandingly.

"She's always that way, she's selfish," Joan said.

"That's no way to speak of your younger sister, is it, Joan?"

"Yes," Joan answered.

"Why is it?"

"Because it is. I don't like her."

"I don't like her," Patsy said.

"She plays with my dolls when I'm at school," Joan said.

"I'm going to school too. I'm going to school," Patsy said.

They walked over to Fifth Avenue, and strolled along the sunny street. The girls talked, and looked in windows, giggled, ran ahead of him, came back and took his hands, walked lady-like at his side for a while, and then kept renewing their competition for their father's attention.

And Arthur, while paying some attention to them, also kept thinking of Annabelle. He would like to meet her strolling along Fifth Avenue, so that she could see his two girls. But that would not be so good. Somehow he sensed, or believed that he sensed, that she would not care for children. And it was best not to have her thinking of him as a father.

"Daddy, why do people go to church?" one of the girls asked.

"Because they believe in God," her father said, his oldest daughter's question interrupting the train of his thoughts.

"Why don't you go?"

"Because Mommy and I believe differently."

They were passing by on the opposite side from St. Patrick's and, as Arthur looked across the street, he saw a crowd emerging from it.

"I think it's funny," Joan said.

"What is it?"

"God is."

"Why is God funny, Joan?"

"Because you're funny."

She giggled. Patsy giggled in imitation of her. The two girls broke away from his hands and giggled.

Arthur for a moment was troubled. He didn't like his oldest daughter's telling him that he was funny. He feared that if she thought he was funny, then perhaps he was. Children often saw with such wonderful clarity.

Then he dismissed the thought from his mind.

They walked on, until the girls got tired and, when they did, he took them home in a cab, and read them stories. The morning passed easily. Arthur, looking at the girls on the floor, and then at Helene, as she entered the room, asked him-

self why he couldn't be happy with this. He was. But if he was why did he want more? And why would he think of doing things, having love affairs that would risk this?

He felt that he had better not have anything to do with Annabelle. His resolution seemed firm. But in five minutes, he found himself thinking of her, and getting impatient for tomorrow.

8.

Arthur and Annabelle sat at the same table in the same restaurant. They were having a cocktail before lunch. But now, Annabelle looked different to him. She wasn't saying much, and he found that he had little to say to her. As they drank, they fell into telling one another of how they had been friends in the old days.

"We're still friends, aren't we?" she asked him.

"Yes," he said.

She had, by the way she had spoken, seemed to him to tell him that the time had come and that she was willing. But this caused him to become tense and fearful. He thought of his home. After all, wasn't this philandering out of place? He was afraid of himself, afraid that he wouldn't stop, and somehow, he now believed that he should.

"Did you have a good weekend?" she asked him.

"Yes. I spent it with my family. I took my two girls out for a walk. I do that every Sunday . . ."

As he spoke, he noticed her face. She wasn't interested in what he was saying.

"And you?"

"What about me?" Annabelle asked.

"Did you have a good weekend?"

"Yes," she said unconvincingly. "I went to see friends in Connecticut."

"Did you meet any charming males?"

"None like you, darling."

She had had another kissing scene, and she had refused at the last moment. She had come back to town early this morning, feeling guilty and somewhat disgusted with herself. She thought of Harry. He might be broken up, and might even leave her if he knew what she did, and what she wanted to do. And she had become convinced that she would not be such a howling success in New York. Still, if she attracted and was seduced by Arthur, after all, he was a person of importance and experience, here!

They were served their food.

As they ate, their conversation was lackadaisical. They didn't have anything to talk about. Every so often, she gazed at him, invitingly, and he stared at her, uncertain.

After eating, they left. Standing outside of the restaurant, they shyly looked at one another.

"When can you come to my hotel?" she asked him.

He took her arm, and told her:

"Isn't it better not to? We're both married. Do you really want me to come to the hotel with you?"

She looked at him, angry for a moment. Her gaze of anger made him uneasy. But then she smiled.

"No, I don't."

"We'll remain friends."

"Thank you, Arthur."

He kissed her goodbye, and they parted. He walked back to his office, proud of himself for having had self-control.

9.

Annabelle gazed out of the window of the Twentieth Century. The Hudson was beautiful in the waning day. It seemed as romantic as anything might be in Europe. The sun was gleaming on the quiet water and, across the river, the scenery was hazy and hilly.

But the beauty of the Hudson only saddened her. In that beauty she would find nothing more than what she saw. She would not find the love she had dreamed of. That love didn't exist and, chasing it, she had almost made herself into a traitor. She was ashamed of herself.

She gazed out of the window, admiring the beauty of river and sun and haze. She told herself that she was going back to her husband, and that she was going to have a baby even though she didn't love him. She continued to gaze out of the window, a wan and wistful and dreamy look on her face.

# CRIME CAVALCADE

BY VINCENT H. GADDIS

### *Double Deal*

Harry Schneider, of Freeport, N. Y., got a double blip from Lady Luck recently. He called police to report aggrievedly that both his car and his motorboat had been stolen, the car from his driveway, the boat from the canal behind his house. Officers found that the car had slid down the steep drive on top of the boat, so that both vehicles were stacked at the bottom of the canal.

### *Department of Utter Confusion*

Santa Monica, Calif., police, experimenting with a new $850 device for testing drunks, were badly disillusioned when a volunteer member of the force was found to have a 75% drunkenness rating, although the sergeant swore he hadn't had a nip for thirty years.

### *Awkward Squad*

In answer to a complaint about a "peeping tom" who was using the roof of the Davenport, Iowa, municipal swimming pool to spy on women in a nearby club, a squad of officers climbed to the roof. Once up, they couldn't get down, and they had to have a bystander below send for the fire department to rescue them. Meanwhile, they found no trace of a prowler.

### *Deep Sea Witness*

One of the weirdest freaks of justice in maritime annals took place back in pirate days in Jamaica. In 1799 a British revenue cutter seized the American ship *Nancy* for carrying contraband, and took her into Port Royal. Unfortunately for British justice, the American crew, before the ship was boarded, had jettisoned the contraband cargo, while the captain pitched overboard the ship's papers. The captain had a false set of papers all ready for use, and these he submitted to arresting officers.

Due to this ruse he and other ship's officers on trial several days later were about to be acquitted for lack of evidence, when the captain of another vessel rushed into court, bearing the original papers of the *Nancy*. He explained that his own crew had just that morning harpooned a shark, and found the incriminating documents in the creature's stomach. The American officers were convicted. To this day, "The Shark's Papers" are exhibited in Kingston at the Institute of Jamaica, and the head of the shark itself is on display in London, at the Royal United Service Institution.

### *Fashions in Felonies*

In Hagerstown, Md., Harry Albacker reported to police that a suitcase had been stolen from the back seat of his car. Its contents: a 60-pound, 10-foot-long python. Albacker is a professional showman.

While Mrs. Elizabeth Gould of Waterbury, Conn., was out shopping, a conscientious thief stole her refrigerator, but substituted an older model.

In Tulsa, Okla., J. M. Friggel reported a baffling theft from his gas well. A derrick, tool house, machinery and drill pipe, which had taken six trucks to haul into position, had completely disappeared.

The Department of Psychology, Fenn College, Cleveland, O., suffered another mysterious loss. Someone stole their lie detector, valued at $500. The chairman of the department, Dr. Blake Crider, has offered to use the machine on the thief to prove his guilt, if the police will only find it.

### *Recreational Note*

Four juveniles in New Britain, Conn., were apprehended by police after stringing a heavy steel cable across a street, a couple of feet off the pavement. They were bored, they explained, because there was no youth center in the city.

### *Postscript*

A municipal judge of Des Moines, Iowa, Don T. Tidrick, was surprised to receive a traffic summons in the mail with a dollar bill pinned to it. Also in the envelope was a note reading: "I love you. I love you. I love you. Signed, Mrs. Don T. Tidrick."

### *Age of Chivalry*

In Yakima, Wash., Mrs. Margaret Graham, blinded by the lights of an approaching car, wound up with her own vehicle in a ditch. Then, she told sheriff's officers, another car stopped and the driver inquired if she were hurt. When she said no, he drove away without assisting her. Soon a second car stopped and the motorist made the same inquiry. But this time on learning she wasn't hurt, the man shoved her into the ditch and stole her purse containing $45, before driving away.

### *Dark Memento*

William Wolfe, of Columbus, O., could have stood it when he discovered that a thief had stolen a sack of groceries from his kitchen. What really made him blow his top, he told police, was the ring he discovered in the bathtub after the theft.

# *Special Gift Subscriptions*

**SOLVE SOME OF YOUR CHRISTMAS PROBLEMS—NOW**

An announcement card bearing your name will be mailed to reach your friends at Christmas time.

*A subscription will give your friends many hours of entertaining reading — and remind them of your thoughtfulness twelve times a year.*

**MONEY-SAVING RATES**

First Subscription . . . (One Year) $4.00, (Two Years) $7.50
Two Subscriptions . . . (One Year) $7.50, (Two Years) $14.00
Each additional 1 Year Subscription, $3.00; 2 Years, $6.00

*Mail this order form with your check or money order made out to:*
MANHUNT *Magazine, Room 1200, 545 Fifth Avenue, New York 17, N. Y.*

**NAME OF PERSON SENDING ORDER:**

_____

*Address* _____

_____

*Also include my own Subscription*
☐ *2-Years*
☐ *1-Year*

★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★

Send MANHUNT regularly for { ☐ 2 Years ☐ 1 Year (Check which)

**TO** _____

*Address* _____

_____

*Sign Gift Card from* _____

★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★

Send MANHUNT regularly for { ☐ 2 Years ☐ 1 Year (Check which)

**TO** _____

*Address* _____

_____

*Sign Gift Card from* _____

# Self-Defense

*Richardson was a powerful man, Scott Jordan knew. And Jordan found out that powerful men scare just as easily as anybody else . . .*

*A Scott Jordan Story*

**BY HAROLD Q. MASUR**

GEORGE RICHARDSON was no assembly line product. He had a long straight body, compelling eyes, a precise mouth, a crisp voice, and the confident assurance of wealth. His hair was silver-grey, though he couldn't have been more than forty-five years of age. He wore his clothes like a college boy and carried himself like a Senator.

He had emerged from his private office to give me a personal convoy. His handshake was quick, firm, and nervous. "Mr. Jordan," he said. "Glad you came. I suppose you're wondering why I wanted to see you."

I nodded. I was not only wondering, I was damned curious, because the outfit that usually handled his law business was a firm of attorneys five names long, with two whole floors in a Wall Street skyscraper. Compared to them, my operation was peanuts.

"Sit down, Mr. Jordan."

I sat in a wide leather chair and took in the surroundings. His office was paneled in Phillipine mahagony, with an original Gaugin on the wall and a priceless Sarouk on the floor. Anyone who thought the layout a little too fancy for a crass business enterprise would be right. George Richardson was not in business. His ancestors had saved him the bother. He maintained this office for the sole purpose of keeping an eye on his investments.

He planted his feet in front of me and I could see that he was under pressure. "Are you free to handle something for me, Jordan?" His voice was tight and so were his jaws.

"Why me?" I asked. "Why not your own lawyers?"

He shook his head impatiently. "Because they're specialists; corporation law, probate, contracts. This is way out of their league."

I sat back. "Tell me about it."

"Here. Read this. It's self-explanatory."

He handed me a piece of paper. I unfolded it and read the message. The writer had used a pencil, printing in block letters.

*Mr. Richardson, sir,*

*Your wife will need a black dress unless you play ball. Andy is too young to die. You can prevent it by coughing up a hundred grand. You can accelerate it by talking to the cops.*

*Use your head and follow instructions. Tonight, six o'clock. Stay near the telephone.*

I looked up at George Richardson. He was biting the bottom corner of his lip. "Andy is the son of your second wife?"

"Yes. I adopted him legally when I married Irene."

"How old is he?"

"Four."

"Where did you find this note?"

"In the morning mail."

"May I see the envelope?"

He found it in the center drawer of his desk. The address was printed in pencil, same as the letter. It carried yesterday's postmark and had been mailed somewhere in the Grand Central area. I wondered about the postmark. It was a new switch — since Andy was, apparently, still safe.

"What am I supposed to do, Jordan?"

"You're supposed to notify the FBI."

"I know — I know . . ." He was

rubbing the creases in his forehead. "Can we afford to risk it? A boy's life is at stake."

I had no words for a moment, thinking it over. I didn't like the responsibility of making a decision. Kidnappers are mean, vindictive, and inhuman. When a life is gone, nobody can bring it back. Resurrection is only a word in the Bible, unrecognized by the medical profession. George Richardson was watching me anxiously.

"Suppose we wait for the telephone call," I said. "We can make our decision then."

He nodded quickly. "I hope you don't think I did wrong. I became a little panicky when I received the letter this morning and I gave into my first impulse. I went to the bank."

"For the money?"

"Yes. I withdrew it in small denominations. Mixed serial numbers."

"Where is it?"

He pointed to a bulging briefcase leaning against a corner of his desk.

"May I see it?"

"Certainly."

One glance was enough. All that currency, neatly arranged and squared away, gave me an odd sensation. Pieces of engraved paper, that's all, but what they represented was something else, a catalytic agent for most of the crimes committed on God's green footstool.

I put it down. "I'm a lawyer, Mr. Richardson, not a private detective. Why did you pick on me?"

"Because of the way you handled the divorce for my first wife." He managed a smile, half bitter, half wry. "Five hundred dollars a week alimony. That's quite a bite, counselor. My own lawyers couldn't cope with you. All right. I paid but I checked. I know your background, the kind of work you do. You have a talent for situations of this kind. I need your help."

It sounded logical enough. I had nicked him plenty for Lydia, the beautiful, restless, petulant creature he had plucked out of the Copa line and married. Why he married her, I don't know. She must have played her cards right. Probably it was the only way he could get her. The episode was brief but tempestuous, lasting six months. I got her the divorce and five hundred a week. Enough to maintain a penthouse, a convertible, and a boy friend.

The boy friend was Neil Corbin, a far more suitable mate. Lydia was out with him the night she died. Corbin had just brought her home after an extensive tour of the bistros along Fifty-second Street. He let her out at the front door and drove her car to the basement garage. Once upstairs, Lydia apparently went out to the terrace and lost her balance. It was fourteen stories down to the rear courtyard, paved in concrete. It seems she had misgauged her alcoholic capacity. The medical examiner found enough bourbon in her brain to float a ferry-boat.

The cops raked Neil Corbin over the coals. He had a very shady record and no visible means of support, except Lydia. But he stuck to his story. He didn't know about the accident until after he reached the apartment.

It was water under the bridge now, almost a year old.

George Richardson broke into my thoughts. "Will you handle the money part of it for me, Jordan?"

"If you like. But I'm against paying off on the basis of threats alone. Make it that easy and he's liable to try again, on you or someone else."

"I can't help it." His jaw was out, bulldog stubborn. "I'll worry about that when it happens. Right now, Andy's safety comes first."

"Have you thought of sending him away?"

"What good would it do? His home is here. I can't keep him away forever."

"Have you spoken to your wife about this?"

He gave me a startled look. "Of course not. She'd go to pieces." He searched my face anxiously. "Do you think I should?"

"Let's see what happens. In the meantime I've got some work to do. I'll be at my office. Phone me as soon as you get your call. If it —"

He jumped as the phone rang. He was staring at it with his jaw loose. A muscle twitched under his left eye.

"It's only three o'clock," I said. "Answer it."

He unbent an elbow at the handset and got it to his ear. There was an obstruction in his throat and he cleared it out before saying, "Hello."

I could hear the diaphragm rattling in the receiver. The unintelligible words were squeak-edged and feverish, like a wire recorder running backwards at high speed. The blood dropped out of George Richardson's face and he spoke in a hoarse, urgent voice.

"Listen, Irene. Do as I say. Sit tight. Don't call a soul. Say nothing. I'll be right home. Understand? Sit tight."

He hung up slowly, automatically, and lifted his eyes. They were stunned.

I said sharply, "What is it?"

His fist landed hard on the desk. "They've done it. They've taken Andy."

"How?"

"Nursery school." He swallowed painfully. "They claim I phoned and said I was sending my car and chauffeur. I haven't got a chauffeur. The man picked him up an hour ago. When my wife got there, Andy was gone." He surged upright. "I must go to her."

"It's time for the FBI," I said.

"No." His voice was flat and emphatic. "I'll pay first. We'll call the FBI after Andy comes home."

"It's your decision," I said. "Only make sure you're at the telephone by six o'clock. Which nursery school did Andy attend?"

He told me the name and gave me the address. He had a tight grip on

the briefcase and was buttoning his coat when I left.

A spinster named Matilda Kane was the school supervisor. There was nothing wrong with her that twenty-five pounds, properly distributed, and the companionship of an enthusiastic male couldn't cure. Irene Richardson had instructed her to say nothing about the incident, so she phoned the Richardson apartment for a green light before talking. Then she looked at me, her eyes gravely troubled, waiting.

"Did you see the man who called for Andy?"

"Yes. He wore a thin black mustache, horn-rimmed glasses, and a chauffeur's cap."

"And the car he was driving?"

"A Chrysler convertible, light green, the same car Mrs. Richardson usually drove. He must have stolen it."

"Could you identify the man if you saw him again?"

"Yes, I — think so."

"How about Andy? He must have known his father didn't have a chauffeur. Wasn't he reluctant to go along?"

"Andy is a very trusting child."

"Intelligent?"

"No more so than other four-year-olds."

I started to leave. "Thank you, Miss Kane."

"Will you let me know what happens as soon as possible?"

"Of course. But don't blame yourself for lack of omniscience. You had no way of knowing."

She shook her head, looking helpless. "I had spoken to Mr. Richardson several times on the phone. The kidnapper must have been someone who knew him well. He did a wonderful job of imitating Mr. Richardson's voice."

"The whole operation was neatly planned."

But was it? Was it really planned as neatly as it looked? There seemed to be a flaw in the caper, but I couldn't put my finger on it. The letter I'd read kept bothering me.

I scouted the neighborhood, trying to find someone who might have seen a light green Chrysler convertible, chauffeur-driven. But cars are a familiar commodity and it had gone unnoticed.

Shortly after six, I phoned George Richardson and got through to him at once. He sounded grim. "I had my call, Jordan. The kidnapper demands action. Holding Andy is too much of a problem. He wants the money tonight.

"What are your instructions?"

"He told me to walk slowly through Riverside Park at three A.M., carrying the money in a paper parcel. I'm to use the outer path between 72nd and 86th Street. His accomplice has the area under surveillance now, watching for anything suspicious. He'll keep his eye on me all the time. If nobody is staked out along the route, if I'm not being followed, if no cars are

around, he'll make contact. If anything goes haywire, his partner will take care of Andy and blow. If the plan runs smoothly, we can expect Andy to be released within the hour somewhere in Manhattan." He paused while static crackled over the wire. "Well, Jordan, what do you think?"

"I think you'd better follow instructions to the letter."

"Of course." There was no doubt in his mind that it was the only course.

"In the meantime," I told him, "I suggest that you stay at your apartment and wait for my call."

"What are you going to do?"

"Nothing. There isn't anything we can do, except sit tight and see what happens."

"I agree. Andy's safety is paramount."

"How is your wife?"

"Frightened. She wants me to thank you for any help you may render."

"I'll do my best."

After we broke the connection, I decided to go home. The next shift might run till dawn or later and I needed rest. I wanted to feel fresh and alert. But closing my eyes failed to erase the picture from my brain. The picture of a four-year-old boy, violently snatched out of safe and familiar surroundings, petrified with fear, held by ruthless men.

They must have evaluated risks and consequences. The enormity of their crime was clear to them. Could they really be trusted to return Andy safe? Andy, an intelligent lad who might some day be in a position to identify them. How simple it would be to eliminate this danger! How easy to wipe away their tracks by killing the boy!

I sat up and abandoned the sofa. I walked stiff-legged around the apartment, feeling impotent, angry with frustration. I thought of the FBI. They had the men, the facilities, the organization. I almost reached for the telephone, but swallowed the impulse, because the scales here were too delicately balanced. We were dealing with jittery and desperate men, their nerves honed to a fine edge, and a single misstep might tip the weights. Kidnapping, a Federal offense, is punishable by death. They had nothing more to lose. Anything might blow the cork, cause them to dump the boy and haul freight.

It was shortly after midnight when I presented myself at the Richardson apartment, on Beekman Place overlooking the East River. I found Irene Richardson to be a tall slender patrician woman with anguished eyes in a drawn face lacking color, fighting to keep herself under control. The muscles in her neck were pulled taut, like the strings of a badly tuned cello. She leaned heavily on her husband's arm, not trusting her own voice. Then it came, in a broken appeal, pleading for help and assurance.

"Do you think Andy is safe?"

I caught a warning glint from the man at her side. An hysterical woman on our hands at this time would be a needless handicap.

"Yes," I said.

"He must be so terribly frightened."

"Children are very resilient, Mrs. Richardson. He'll forget all this fast enough once he's home safe."

She closed her eyes as if in prayer. "Dear Lord, I hope so."

She permitted her husband to lead her out of the room. He reappeared a moment later, his jaw set. "All right, Jordan," he rumbled. "Let's go."

I shook my head. "It's too early. If your apartment is being watched, it may make them suspicious."

He nodded and began wearing out the rug, pacing restlessly, champing at the bit, a man driven to the limits of his endurance. He paused at a mirror-covered bar, poured a stiff brandy, and tossed it off, not offering me any. Because of the strain he was under, I forgave his lapse of manners. I would have refused anyway, since alcohol and emergencies don't mix well.

A pack of cigarettes later, I glanced at my strap watch and said, "It's almost time. I don't think we should be seen leaving together. I'll go out first. Follow me in about twenty minutes."

"Where will you be?"

"At the midway mark. I'll take up a position at West End and 79th, the northeast corner. Don't come near me until it's all over. Got that straight?"

"Yes."

I said, "Good luck," and left him chewing the inside of his cheek.

At three A.M., in that neighborhood, the streets were deserted. Overhead, the moon hung like an open porthole in the sky. Against it, the solid mass of buildings was a black silhouette, stretching endlessly. Each intersection was an island bathed in lemon-yellow light, with colored overtones from the traffic signals. An occasional car hissed past, tires humming.

A forgotten cigarette smoked itself between my lips. The luminous hands on my watch continued their slow arc. It was four A.M. and no sign yet of George Richardson.

I pictured him walking slowly and painfully along the outer path of Riverside Park, eyes piercing the darkness, nerves attuned to any interruption, while a boy's life hung in the balance.

A car roared through the night. Twin headlamps came hurtling up the street. Tires screamed as the brakes were suddenly clamped near where I stood and a taxi ground to a jolting halt in front of me. The door opened and George Richardson beckoned.

I climbed in and settled beside him. He was wound up tighter than a dollar watch.

"Where to, Mac?" the driver said.

"Head downtown." Richardson's

fingers curled around my arm. His eyes were burning and he spoke in a hoarse, barely controlled whisper. "The man came. He picked me up near 81st Street."

"Was he alone?"

"I think so, yes. He pulled alongside in a car and called my name. I went over and he said, 'Give me the package.' I handed it to him and he stepped on the gas." The fingers tightened on my sleeve, nails digging in. "I got his license number, Jordan. 6Y 46–07. Can you find out who he is?"

"Yes, when the license bureau opens, providing the car isn't stolen."

"We must get Andy back first."

"That goes without saying."

"What do we do now?"

"We wait and see if they keep their promise."

He shook his head. "On the telephone, the man said they'd let Andy go somewhere in Manhattan. How do we know where to find him?"

"We don't. Most probably some cop will pick the boy up and call your apartment."

"Then let's go back." He leaned forward and gave the driver his address.

Irene Richardson was waiting for us. She got the answer from her husband's eyes, took a shuddering breath, and went to prepare a pot of coffee. We commenced the vigil in silence. George sat with his eyes straight ahead, fixed and unblinking. The woman kept working her fingers together, jumping nervously at every sound, watching the telephone, as if willing it to ring.

By five-thirty the clutch was slipping. Suddenly she broke training and was on her feet, chin out of control. "I — I can't stand it . . . Why don't they call? Where is he? Oh, Andy — Andy —"

Her husband got her down on the sofa again, stroking her hands.

I said, "These things take time, Mrs. Richardson."

But the delay bothered me. I didn't like it. There was no reason for it, unless the kidnappers had decided on a double-cross. The same thought must have entered Richardson's mind, for he threw me an angry look, bleak and cold.

Another hour and dawn crept through the window in a soiled gray smudge. Traffic noises began rumbling in the street below. The woman had her face in her hands now, sobbing quietly, shoulders convulsed.

At nine-thirty I went to the telephone and put a call through to a man I knew in the license bureau. I gave him the number and waited while he checked. He got the information and I thanked him.

George Richardson was beside me, gripping my sleeve. "Well?"

"A man named Steve Ballou owns the car. He lives on the west side, near Tenth Avenue. I don't know whether the car was stolen or not."

"Can you find out?"

"Yes." I dialed Homicide West

and got through to Detective-Lieutenant John Nola.

"Well, counselor," he said, genuinely pleased. "A pleasure. Haven't heard from you in several months. What cooks on the legal front?"

"The usual," I said. "Will you do me a favor, John?"

"What?"

"I'd like to know if a certain car was stolen."

"That's not my department, but I'll find out for you. Give me the registration number."

"6Y 46–07."

It didn't take long and a moment later his voice was back in my ear. "Got it, counselor. No larceny reported."

"One thing more, Lieutenant. Will you have someone check the files on a character named Steve Ballou? I'd like to know if he has a record."

"Can do. Will call you back."

George Richardson literally bit his fingernails in the interim. When the phone rang, he grasped the handset and said hoarsely, "Yes?" His face fell and he handed me the instrument.

It was Nola. "Here it is, Scott. Steve Ballou, four times arrested, one conviction, served a term at Sing Sing, released three years ago."

"Known associates?" I asked.

"Seems to be a lone operator. His cellmate up the river was Neil Corbin. They roomed together for a brief time after Corbin was paroled. And that's about it."

"Thank you, John."

"Good luck, counselor." He broke the connection.

George Richardson said, "Did he — what is it, man? For heaven's sake, what's wrong?"

"A lead," I said. "Ballou and Neil Corbin are friends."

"Corbin?" His gaping eyes were bright with conjecture.

"Your first wife's boy friend. The man who brought her home the night she was killed."

"He took Andy?"

"One of them did."

A nerve bulged and twitched in his temple. He swung decisively on his heel and stalked from the room. He came back jamming a loaded clip into the heel of an automatic. He handled it well, with a neat economy of motion.

"Took this from a dead German colonel," he said. "Know how to use it, too."

"Oh, no," his wife wailed, "please, George . . ."

He ignored her. "All right, Jordan, let's roll."

"We ought to have some help on this."

"No time for explanations. Let's go."

I followed him down and we took a cab to Ballou's address. It was an ancient brownstone in a seedy neighborhood. Ballou's apartment was on the third floor.

"All right," George said, "here's the program." His voice was incisive, no longer irresolute, and I

sensed a subtle change in our relationship. He was leading now, the bloodhound on a scent. "You stand back and to one side, Jordan. I'll ring the bell. If he turns the latch, hit the door hard. We'll take these goons by surprise."

I nodded and we went up. There was a tiny peephole in Ballou's door. I had a feeling the place was deserted, but I braced myself nevertheless. Richardson stood close and rang the bell. There was a long pause. No sound from within, no sound at all.

His finger depressed the button again. Then I heard the latch slide back. The door started to open and I hit it hard. I caught it squarely with my shoulder, almost tearing the hinges off. It struck the man behind it, slamming him back. He caught his balance with a frantic shuffle, eyes staring wildly in his head and I recognized him then, Neil Corbin. His angular face was white and desperate. Panic flooded his eyes.

I saw his hand flash under his lapel and heard Richardson's shout, "Duck, Jordan, duck!"

But I wasn't fast enough and the gun jumped into Corbin's hand. It was a Smith & Wesson, caliber .38, and the gaping barrel looked like an open doorway to hell. I threw myself flat as it thundered and my ears were ringing instantly from the concussion.

I heard a nasty slap that wrung a bleat of pain from Richardson's throat, and Neil Corbin ducked out of the foyer into the living room.

I grabbed the automatic and snaked along the floor to the archway. Neil Corbin had taken to his heels and was racing toward the kitchen. I went after him and when I got there his head was out of the window and he was pulling his leg through to the fire escape.

"Corbin!" I yelled. "Hold it!"

He swiveled and pumped out two blind shots. The slugs bit viciously into the plaster behind me. I saw the searing venom in his eyes as he sighted more carefully and heard Richardson shout behind me. I turned to see him point the gun at Corbin. The shot caught Corbin in the chest and he tumbled over backward, legs flying awkwardly.

I knew he was finished and I didn't bother with him. I went back through the living room and found another door and opened it. A small boy was on the bed, trussed hand and foot, a strip of adhesive tape covering his mouth. From the numb, inanimate look in his eyes I knew that he'd been drugged. I untied him and gently removed the tape from his lips.

George Richardson staggered into the room behind me. His gun was in his hand. "Andy!" he said. "Andy, boy!"

We caught hell, both of us, from the Police Department and from the FBI. Lieutenant Nola, especially, went after my hide. It took all morning and most of the afternoon

to get the story told and everything cleaned up. George Richardson's wound was not serious and he was able to navigate under his own power.

When he finally had me alone, the Lieutenant said dourly, "We bust cops from the force for going it alone. You know better than that, Scott. And another thing, you and Richardson left Neil Corbin out on that fire escape wedged between a couple of rungs. Innocent pedestrians can get hurt that way. Don't ever do it again."

"How about Steve Ballou?" I said. "Any chance of nailing him?"

"Ballou is out of it. He had permission from his parole officer to leave the state. He works for a plumbing outfit and he's in Ohio, driving around to see their midwest accounts. Corbin worked this out alone. He must have gotten a lot of information from Lydia Richardson before she was killed."

"That ties it up then."

"Just about, except for two items; a Sullivan Law violation against Mr. Richardson for possession of that Mauser automatic he used — although I doubt if the D.A. will press the charge."

"And the second item?"

"The money. One hundred grand. Corbin hid it somewhere. We took the place apart and couldn't find it."

"That's something to look for. Maybe Richardson can still use my services."

"Yeah." Nola shuffled some papers on his desk. "Sorry, lad. Reports to make out. Keep your nose clean."

My muscles ached with exhaustion. I was saturated with weariness, but I walked anyway, because the past twenty-four hours kept whirling through my brain in brief kaleidoscopic flashes.

The ransom money kept hounding me. And then, quite suddenly, I had a pretty good idea where it was, and I stopped off at a drug store and patronized the phone booth, and put a call through to George Richardson's apartment. His wife answered, sounding exultant, and she thanked me effusively. Her husband was at his office, working late.

I quit the store and flagged a cab.

A light was burning behind the frosted glass door of Richardson's office. He glanced up as I entered and flashed me a gleaming white smile, extending his left hand because his right arm was in a sling. This time he remembered his manners and offered me a drink.

I took it, since I did not expect to get any fee for handling the case.

"You did a fine job of work, Jordan. Fine. I'm delighted."

"How's Andy?"

"Coming along fine. He was under drugs most of the time and hardly remembers a thing." Richardson opened a desk drawer and pulled out a check book. He flipped it open and uncapped a fountain pen. "I'd like to show my appreciation, Jor-

dan, by doubling your usual fee."

"The case isn't closed yet. I'd like to find the ransom money first."

"But where can you look?"

"Right here," I said. "Somewhere in this office."

The smile slid off his face and he sat up sharply, staring at me with a queer puckered look in his eyes. "I — what do you mean?"

"I mean that you never gave it to Corbin, that he never appeared at the park, that the package you carried last night was a phoney stuffed with worthless paper which you tossed into the bushes somewhere."

"You must be crazy!"

"Yeah. Like a fox. That whole kidnapping was a sham, conceived and staged by you, a dodge, dust in the eyes, to conceal your true motive."

"Which was?"

"To murder Neil Corbin. To kill him in front of a witness, apparently in self-defense."

He bent forward stiffly, the muscles in his face rigid. "That's ridiculous."

"Is it? Then let me spell it out. Neil Corbin was blackmailing you. He probably saw you leaving your first wife's apartment the night she was killed and he guessed that she hadn't fallen, that you must have pushed her. He may even have found some evidence to prove it, something you struck her over the head with, bearing your fingerprints, which he hid. He never told the cops, oh, no, not Corbin, there'd be no profit in that. But he told you. He told you and made it pay off."

A strained laugh, short and mirthless. "I don't understand. Why would I kill Lydia?"

"Because of five hundred dollars a week alimony. Twenty-six grand a year. Add it up over a ten year period. Over a quarter of a million. She had no intention of marrying Corbin and relinquishing her income. There was no way of getting off the nut. You'd have to pay and pay and pay. So you decided to have it out with Lydia and waited at her apartment that night. Maybe you tried to make a cash settlement and she laughed in your face. Maybe you lost your head and struck her with a bookend and then had to cover up by dropping her over the ledge.

"You gained nothing, however, because Corbin saw you as he left the garage, and you started paying again. Then you had a bright idea. You dreamed up a scheme. You offered Corbin a lump sum, and probably told him you'd have to get the money from your wife, and that the only way to work it would be through her son Andy. You said you would lend him your car and call the school. You promised to get the money and deliver it to him and bring Andy back. You told him no one else would be involved, the cops would not be notified. And he believed you because you were personally involved.

"You wrote the ransom note yourself, mailed it yourself, and called me in. You arranged for us to find Corbin with the boy and you shot him when we broke into the apartment. There was a peephole in the door and he would have opened it for no one but you. He was expecting you to bring him the money."

Beads of moisture had formed along Richardson's upper lip. "Guesswork," he said hoarsely. "All guesswork; you said so yourself."

"Up to that point, yes," I said. "But the rest of it we can prove."

The inner edges of his eyebrows drew together questioningly. "How?"

"You gave me the license number of Ballou's car. But that car is somewhere in Ohio with its owner and couldn't possibly be in New York. The woman at Andy's school thought she recognized your voice. She certainly did, because it actually was your voice. And no professional kidnapper would have written a letter first and then taken the boy. But it made no difference to you because you were in control of the situation at all times. You had no intention of calling the FBI or letting anyone else interfere."

"Look, Jordan. If I wanted to kill Neil Corbin, why didn't I just do it when nobody was around?"

"Because you didn't want to start a homicide investigation. You were afraid the police would find his bank deposits and start looking for their source. They might tie him up to you through Lydia. His deposits would coincide with your withdrawals. No, sir, it was better this way. Involve him in a kidnapping and shoot him in cold blood. You'd be a hero."

Richardson's tongue coiled slowly over his lips. "It's a flimsy case. They can't convict me."

"Not so flimsy," I said. "There's plenty of corroboration, especially when they find the ransom money hidden right here in your office."

He swallowed hugely and his eyes kindled with desperate hope. He was grasping at straws. "Corbin is dead. Nobody can place me near Lydia's apartment the night she fell." But he didn't believe it himself. I waited, watching.

I don't know what he was trying to prove, but suddenly he snatched a letter opener off his desk, and lunged at me. I had to twist him plenty before he subsided.

The way he looked now, I wasn't sure he'd ever live long enough for the State of New York to strap him down and deliver the proper voltage.

I figured he was due for a heart attack any minute, maybe before the boys arrived.

# Portrait of a Killer

## No. 19 — Herbert Mills

BY DAN SONTUP

THE SUBJECT of the "perfect crime" is one that has always caused a lot of speculation. Stories have been written around this theme, criminologists have discussed it in textbooks, and every now and then someone takes more than an academic interest in the subject and tries to commit the perfect crime.

Herbert Mills was such a man.

He had a great interest in crime, but in the past it had always been confined to reading about it and studying stories of crime and criminals. He knew, from all his reading, that the closest anyone can come to committing a crime that cannot be solved is to kill someone you don't know, for no reason whatsoever. But who would commit such a crime? Who would risk his life and kill someone merely to feel that he had gotten away with murder? There has to be an extremely strong reason for a man to take the ultimate step and snuff out a human life. Herbert knew this; and he also knew that, no matter how careful a killer might be, modern police methods can uncover and track down the slightest clue — even though it may take time. But this didn't stop Herbert. The subject of the perfect crime had been on his mind a long time, and he finally found a way to put his theory into practice one afternoon in the movies.

He had gone there to spend a couple of hours relaxing and watching a good show, but he soon forgot all about the movies. A woman came in and took the empty seat next to him and, after a while, Herbert was aware that the woman kept turning her head to peer at him in the darkness. Herbert was young, not bad looking, and, even though the woman appeared to be twice his age, that didn't stop him. Here was his chance.

Herbert waited a while longer and then leaned closer to the woman and made some comment on the picture. It was a harmless beginning, and he knew that, if she refused to talk to him or made some objection, he could just get up and change his seat, and that would be that.

However, the woman responded, and then Herbert lost no time. Before the picture had ended, Herbert had completely charmed the woman there in the darkened theater and had even gone so far as to make a date to meet her on a street corner the next evening. Herbert

then left the woman sitting in the theater and went home to plan the rest of his perfect crime. Incredible as it may seem, this was his sole motive: to kill someone — anyone — and get away with it.

It was the ideal setup for Herbert. He didn't know the woman, she didn't know him, and there wouldn't be any way of connecting the two of them after the murder. All Herbert had to do was to move very carefully, and his plan would work perfectly. He stayed at home and waited, and when the time came to meet the woman, he took a pair of dress gloves from a drawer, slipped them on his hands, and then went out to keep his date.

True to her promise, the woman showed up on time on the street corner, and after walking around a bit with Herbert, she voiced no objection when he suggested that they go into the park and sit down for a while.

Once in the park, Herbert steered her to a romantic but quite deserted spot. Romance wasn't on his mind, though. After chatting for a few moments, Herbert decided that the time was ripe. In order to keep the woman from getting suspicious until it was too late, Herbert bent his head down as though he were going to kiss her. She closed her eyes and raised her face to his, thus exposing her neck.

Herbert kept his eyes open and, while the woman was waiting for his kiss, he slipped his gloved hands around her throat and began to choke her. It was all over with very quickly. The woman struggled a bit, but Herbert held on tight, and the grip of his hands kept her from making an outcry.

When the woman finally lay still, Herbert released his hold on her throat. She looked dead, but he couldn't be sure. What was the use of committing the perfect crime if your victim didn't die? So, Herbert picked up a heavy stone from the ground and started to beat the woman on the head. It was a distasteful chore to him; somehow it seemed a lot more brutal than just strangling her to death. He didn't hit her very hard or very long with the stone but, when he had finished, he was positive she was dead. He rolled the body into a nearby ditch and then went home to wait for someone to discover the results of his actions.

But, after several days, nothing appeared in the newspapers about the finding of a dead woman in the park, and so Herbert went back to the ditch, saw that the body was still undiscovered, and decided he would have to do something about that. All his work and planning would be wasted if no one found the body. He went to a phone, called a newspaper, and offered to sell them an exclusive tip on a strangled woman in the park.

Needless to say, Herbert got prompt action. Police and reporters soon showed up, and Herbert led

them to the ditch, saying that he had found the body while strolling through the park by himself.

For a while, Herbert had a really good time. It appeared as though the crime were baffling the police, as he had planned. Since the woman hadn't been raped or robbed, and there appeared to be no motive at all for the crime, the police had to resort to routine legwork in tracing her actions and in inquiring into any possible enemies she might have had.

Herbert chuckled and was quite pleased with himself, but this didn't last long. He didn't know it, but he had been under active suspicion almost from the start. For one thing, when he reported finding the body, he had mentioned a strangled woman, and the police had to wait for the autopsy before they were certain that the woman had died from strangulation and not from the beating she had taken around the head. For another, in giving his story to the newspapers, Herbert had waxed poetic and had described the woman's pale face when he found her, but her face was almost black from strangulation.

It didn't take the police long to dig up witnesses who had seen Herbert enter the park with the woman and also to find that some hairs found on the woman matched Herbert's. In addition, some wool fabric discovered under the victim's fingernails matched the cloth of Herbert's suit.

Herbert was quite surprised when the police arrested him and accused him of the murder, but he took it all very philosophically. He readily confessed to the killing and, despite the fact that he had no real motive, he was deemed sane by the authorities.

His "perfect crime" ended up where most of them do — in the execution chamber.

# Classification: Homicide

*The police turned up suspect after suspect. But every suspect had a perfect alibi . . .*

*A Police File Novel*

**BY JONATHAN CRAIG**

THE dead girl lay near the chimney, about four feet from the parapet that fronted on Sixty-ninth Street. It was only a quarter past eight of a hot August morning, but the surrounding roofs were crowded with tenants who had climbed up to see the show. We were nine stories above the street, but this was still one of the smallest buildings in the neighborhood, and with all those people watching, you got the feeling

of being on a stage, with the roofs and windows of the taller buildings all around serving as a kind of amphitheater.

My partner, Walt Logan, and I had caught the squeal just as we came on duty at the squad room for the day watch. The apartment building was only two short blocks from the Twentieth Precinct station house, and so we'd double-timed it on foot, rather than bother checking out an RMP car.

Walt and I stood together, a little apart from the other cops, studying the dead girl. She lay on her side with her knees drawn up, an extremely pretty girl of about twenty or twenty-one. She had been stabbed twice in the back and once in the left side. There was very little blood, which meant that she had probably died from the first thrust of the knife. She had dark auburn hair, caught at the back with a wide silver band, and was wearing a pale green dress and black shoes with very high heels. Both the dress and the shoes seemed to be of high quality, and so did the jeweled watch on her left wrist.

We couldn't examine the body further, or search the clothing, because female DOA's can be touched and searched only by policewomen. We'd had one of the patrolmen phone for a policewoman at the same time he notified the District Attorney's Office for us.

Walt shook his head slowly. "Looks almost as if she'd just lain down there to take a nap, doesn't it, Steve?"

"Maybe she was lucky," I said. "Maybe she never even knew what happened to her."

"Well, it was over fast, anyhow. There's no sign of a struggle, that I can see. Not a scratch on her face or arms, and that dress looks like it'd been pressed just a couple minutes before somebody slipped that knife into her."

I nodded. "I think we can forget about assault, and that wrist watch pretty much rules out robbery."

"I wonder what the hell she was doing up here."

"She was with some guy, most likely. Somebody she knew well enough to come up on the roof with."

"That wouldn't have to be *too* well," Walt said. "There's a lot of romance takes place on these roofs at night."

"Yeah, that's so. Well, we'll probably find out soon enough, once we get a make on her."

"I wish that policewoman would hurry it up a little. We're not doing any good hanging around here."

A gust of wind blew across the rooftop and lifted the girl's dress. There were a couple of long whistles from the roof just above, and someone giggled. Walt bent quickly and tugged the dress back down. Several watchers laughed out loud.

"Listen to those characters," Walt said tightly. "They're probably sorry they didn't see her get stabbed."

"There's always a few like that," I said. "Listen, Walt. There's no point in both of us losing time up here. You got the sixty-one?"

He fished a folded piece of paper from his pocket and handed it to me. It was the regular Complaint Report Form, which is made out for all squeals, from disorderly conduct to murder. Walt had grabbed it from the desk officer as we passed through the muster room on our way out of the station house. It was brief and undetailed, but it would be the key document in the department file pertaining to this homicide, and would be the basis upon which everything else was built.

Walt and I followed the usual practice of detective teams in splitting our watch, so that one of us caught squeals for the first half of the watch and the other for the second. This one had come in during my half of the watch, and so I would be in charge of the entire investigation and responsible for all paper work connected with it, while Walt would act as my assistant.

"What've you got in mind?" Walt asked.

"I want to talk to the super, and maybe to the guy who spotted her."

"And leave me alone with the D.A.'s man? This is *your* squeal, don't forget."

I grinned. "You've handled D.A.'s men before, Walt. We want the fastest make we can get."

"Yeah. Well, just don't get lost. Things are really going to get cracking around here, once everybody shows up."

I glanced up at the surrounding roofs. "No use giving them a spectacle," I said. "Take the girl inside before the policewoman and the assistant M.E. go to work on her, Walt."

"Yeah. Just don't leave me by my lonesome too long, that's all."

"While I'm gone, you might as well take another look around the roof. Maybe we missed something the first time."

"All right."

I turned and went down the iron stairs to the top floor and along the corridor to the self-service elevator. I'd left a patrolman stationed midway between the fire stairs and the elevator, so there were no tenants in the corridor. But the door of almost every apartment was either wide open or partly ajar, with peoples' heads bobbing in and out along its entire length. I took some pretty sour looks and ignored some pretty definite remarks about my ancestry. I couldn't blame them. Most of them had jobs to go to, and they didn't like being ordered to stay inside their apartments until we told them they could leave. New Yorkers are not the most reticent people in the world when it comes to telling cops what they happen to be thinking at the time, and these tenants were no exception. But what seemed to them a highhanded way to operate was SOP in a situation

such as this one, and there was nothing I or Walt could do about it.

Two radio units had arrived at the apartment house a few moments before Walt and I reached it. We'd stationed patrolmen at the front and back entrances, and put a third on the switchboard. While this last man had been calling each apartment, requesting the tenants to stay inside, Walt and I had posted another man in the elevator, and then gone up with the other patrolmen to the roof.

Meanwhile, the Communications Bureau had sent an ambulance from the nearest hospital and notified the Medical Examiner's office. As soon as Walt and I had discovered we had a homicide, Walt had called the squad commander at the station house. He, in turn, would notify other interested parties and offices.

My first job was to determine the dead girl's identity. I'd sent a patrolman to round up the super, but the patrolman had come back to report the super gone and his wife unable to tell us where we could find him. The super's wife had told the patrolman she knew none of the tenants, and had never seen any of them, except for one or two men who had come to the super's basement apartment at one time or another to make complaints or request repairs. She'd said she was an invalid, spent most of her time in bed, and had not been out of the apartment in nearly two years.

The switchboard was not in operation between midnight and eight A.M. The super's wife had told the patrolman that the operator who came on duty then, a man, was often late. Apparently such had been the case this morning, because there had been no one at the board when we arrived. Usually, when we have an unidentified DOA in an apartment house, we can get a tentative identification from either the super or the switchboard operator, but in this case we hadn't been able to contact either one.

The patrolman we'd posted in the elevator took me down to the ground floor. The switchboard operator was still missing, and a check with the patrolman posted at the rear entrance showed that the super had not returned to his apartment.

I rode back up to the top floor, glanced at the Complaint Report again to make sure of the apartment number, and walked along the corridor to 908.

2.

The man who opened the door to my knock was, I guessed, no more than thirty, but his hair was as white as it would ever be. It looked even whiter because of his deep tan and dark eyes, and when you noticed that his eyelashes were white too, the effect was a little startling. He was about an inch taller than I, and about four inches wider through the shoulders.

"You Mr. Henderson?" I asked.

"Yes."

I showed him my badge. "My name's Manning. I'll be in charge of the investigation."

"You don't believe in taking any chances, do you?"

"What do you mean?"

"Making everyone stay in his apartment this way. You certainly can't suspect all of us." He glanced both ways along the corridor and raised his voice as he said this, wanting, I supposed, to be a self-appointed spokesman for the others on the floor.

"We can talk better inside, Mr. Henderson," I said.

He hesitated a moment, then stood back to let me step past him. He kept his hand on the doorknob, frowning at me.

"Would you mind closing the door, please?" I asked.

He shrugged, closed the door and motioned to a studio couch. "Might as well sit down," he said.

I sat down and waited a moment for him to look me over before he sat down in an easy chair across from me and crossed his legs.

"You found the body, I believe," I said.

He nodded.

"How'd that come about?"

"Why, just the way I told the man on the phone. I went up to the roof this morning, and she was there. I saw her as soon as I stepped out."

"Did you touch the body?"

He smiled at me, a little pityingly. "Of course I didn't. Anyone knows better than to touch somebody who's been murdered."

"But you did get close enough to know she was dead?"

"Naturally. I said she was dead when I phoned the police." He shook a cigarette from a package and took his time lighting it. "I held the back of my pocket watch close to her nose and mouth. When I took it away again it was still bright. No breath had condensed on it. I knew then she was dead."

"I see."

"I hope what I did doesn't upset you."

I didn't let him nettle me. You run into all kinds, and Henderson's form of cop-baiting was comparatively mild. We treat citizens with as much respect and politeness as we can; and sometimes, with types like Henderson, that can be the toughest part of an assignment.

"Can you identify the girl for me, Mr. Henderson?" I asked.

"Her name is — was Barbara Lawson."

I got out my notebook and pencil. "Did she live here in the building?"

"Yes, she did. In 601." I got the pitying smile again. "That's really surprising, isn't it? I mean, that she'd live right here in this very building."

I wrote down the girl's name and apartment number. "There's nothing so surprising about it," I said. "And then again, it wouldn't be too surprising if she'd been a guest here, either."

His eyes narrowed a little. "Just what is that supposed to mean?"

I closed my notebook over my finger and settled myself a little more comfortably on the couch. "It's not supposed to mean anything, Mr. Henderson," I said, keeping my voice a lot more friendly than I wanted to. "I was just pointing out the reason for my question. We have to follow routine, you know. All this is just part of it."

"It didn't sound that way."

"I'm sorry," I said. "Did you know the girl well?"

He studied me for a moment, as if debating with himself whether he should let me off so easily or give me a bad time. Finally he shook his head. "No, I didn't know her too well. I got her an apartment here about — well, I guess it was about six months ago. I'd gone out with her a few times, and she was looking for a place. When I found out there was going to be a vacancy here, I told her about it."

"She live there alone?"

"Yeah — alone. She wasn't married, if that's what you're getting at. Fooling around with married women is one thing I don't do, and never have."

I opened my notebook again. "What can you tell me about her?"

He leaned forward and, without his eyes once leaving mine, began slowly and carefully to mash out his cigarette in a tray on the cocktail table. "I want to know one thing," he said. "I want an honest answer. . . . Do you suspect *me* of this?"

"It's a little early for us to suspect anyone yet, Mr. Henderson," I said. "And on the other hand, cops have to work on the premise that *anyone* could be guilty. It's as I told you. These are simply routine questions that have to be asked, and it's up to me to ask them. It's my job, just like driving a truck or keeping books."

He straightened slowly and now his face showed a slight flush beneath its heavy tan. "That's just about the kind of answer I expected," he said. "I didn't have to call the police, you know. I could have just left her there and saved myself all this annoyance."

I let him glare at me a while, and then I said, "About Miss Lawson. What can you tell me about her?"

"Not a hell of a lot, Manning. I met her in a bar. I had the stool next to hers . . . Well, you know how those things go. We went out a few times after that. And like I said before, I told her about the vacancy here in the apartment house. Frankly, I thought that by doing her a favor like that, and having her in the same building, might facilitate things." He paused. "It didn't, though. I saw her only a few times after that. After she moved in, I mean. She was a beautiful girl, but she was just a little too hard on my billfold."

"You know any of her friends or acquaintances?"

"No. I always tried to keep her by herself as much as I could. I

guess I worked up a pretty good-sized yen for her, but nothing came of it. It cost me around a hundred dollars every time I took her out. A man can't take too much of that. Not me, anyhow." He lit another cigarette. I noticed he did it naturally, without making a production of it, and it seemed that some of his hostility might be leaving him. "She mentioned a lot of people, off and on, but I don't remember any of them."

"You ever in her apartment?"

"Once. I didn't make out. That was the last date I had with her."

"What'd she do for a living?"

"She was a model. Fashion work, I think."

"What's your line of work, Mr. Henderson?"

"I'm a draftsman. With Sheaffer and Jacoby."

"And you never met anyone else who knew Barbara Lawson?"

"That's right."

"When was the last time you saw her?"

"I told you."

"You told me the last time you had a date with her. You mean you haven't seen her since? Even on the street? In the hallway here?"

"Oh." He seemed to be having a hard time keeping from getting teed off again. "I saw her yesterday afternoon. She was getting out of a cab in front of the house here when I came home. I walked on down to the corner and back, to make sure she'd have time to go up before I got there."

"Why?"

"Personal matter."

"I appreciate that. Still . . ."

He shrugged. "I guess it doesn't make any difference, at that. It just happens I didn't want to meet her in the lobby or the elevator. We didn't hit it off too well on that last date we had. Both of us got around to saying some pretty nasty things before it was over. I — well, I just simply didn't feel much like coming face to face with her again, that's all."

I heard the elevator doors slide open, and then several pairs of footsteps came along the corridor. I listened to them going up the iron stairs to the roof, and then I rose and moved toward the door.

"Just one thing more, Mr. Henderson," I said. "Do you make a habit of going up on the roof every morning?"

"I was waiting for that," he said. "You just had to ask that one, didn't you?"

"As a matter of fact, I did. How about it?"

"You're in for a disappointment. The answer's yes. I go up there *every* morning, except when the weather's too bad."

"Any particular reason?"

"A very particular one, Manning. I go up there because I *like* to go there. I like the view. I like to look down toward the Hudson. I don't feel obliged to describe the feeling it gives me, but it's a good one." He got up and crossed to the door

and opened it for me. "You'll have to try it yourself sometime, Manning, you really will."

"Maybe I'll do that," I said, as I stepped into the corridor. "Well, thanks very much, Mr. Henderson. I may have to talk to you again later on. I'm sorry about the inconvenience, but —"

"I'm already dreading it," he said, and closed the door with just a little more force than most people find necessary to accomplish the same operation.

I thought about him as I made my way to the roof. One of the fundamentals of police investigation — in a homicide where the killer is unknown — is that you must look first to the husband or wife, and then to the person who found the body. They are automatic suspects, always, and as often as not your investigation need go no further. The reason for suspecting the husband or wife is obvious enough, and while I don't pretend to know the mental quirks behind a murderer's wish to have policemen admire his handiwork, a surprising number of them do report their own homicides. This is equally true of arsonists. And the fact that detectives are sent to the funerals of persons who have been murdered by unapprehended killers, is well known.

Many a murderer has been caught that way, and because of this fact, some funerals have been attended by more detectives than mourners.

3.

I stepped out on the roof and walked over to the girl's body. The footsteps I'd heard in the corridor had belonged to the policewoman, the assistant M.E., and the ambulance attendants. The surrounding roofs were more crowded than ever and there were at least two people watching from every window in sight.

"Well, if it isn't my partner," Walt Logan said with mock sternness. "Glad to see you back. How was your trip? And why didn't you drop us a post card now and then?"

I nodded to the policewoman and the assistant M.E. "Hello, Rosie. How are you, Ted?"

"This is a fine way to start the day," Rosie said. "Let's get her inside somewhere." She motioned to the gallery. "Those yahoos make me sick."

"It would be better," Ted said. "Is it all right to move the body, Steve?"

"Can't, right now," I said. "The lab boys and the photographer haven't been here yet."

"They're on their way up," Rosie said. "We saw them unloading their gear off the truck as we came in." She looked up at the other roofs again. "Listen. There's enough of us here so that we can stand real close around her. Sort of form a screen. You know?"

"We might as well, I guess," I said. "It'll take the techs a while."

I called the patrolmen and the ambulance attendants in close, and we made a tight circle around the girl's body. The policewoman made her search quickly and efficiently, and then the assistant M.E. took over. Neither of them disturbed the position of the body by even the fraction of an inch.

"Well, that just about does it," the assistant M.E. said. There's nothing more I can do till I get her to Bellevue."

I looked at the policewoman. "How about it, Rosie?"

"A waste of time, Steve. No hidden money or narcotics. No weapons — not even a razor blade in her hair. No anything. All I can tell you is that those clothes are good. The best. There aren't any National Recovery Board tags in the seams — not that it matters. She got the dress at Delano's, on Fifth Avenue. The shoes are Helen Munson's, and that's just about the most expensive brand there is, outside of custom stuff." She took a search form from her shoulder bag and began filling it out. "And if you're interested — that auburn hair's natural. The girl was born with it."

"I wonder what happened to the D.A. and his guys," Walt said. "Maybe they're as shorthanded as we are."

"They stay pretty busy in this town," I said. I turned to the assistant M.E. "How's it look, Ted?"

He snapped his bag shut and shook his head. "I'm a little concerned about the lack of blood, Steve. We can't expect much, if she died almost instantly. But still there seems to be just too darned little of it. Those are knife wounds, of course, but there's always the possibility she died some other way *before* she was knifed. I remember a case — back in '41, I think it was — where a man shot another. Got him right through the heart, but it was dark and he couldn't be sure. He tried to shoot the man again, but the gun jammed. So he shucked out a knife and stabbed him a dozen or so times in the chest. We thought we had a clear case of death by stab wounds, until we posted the body. Then we found that one of the knife thrusts had gone into his chest at exactly the spot where the bullet struck him. The slug was flattened out against a bone, and it had a slice in it where the knife had struck it as it traveled exactly the same path."

I nodded. The doc was right not to take anything for granted, of course. Sometimes the most obvious things are obvious only because someone went to a great deal of trouble to make them look that way.

"How long would you say she's been dead?" I asked.

"Well, the postmortem lividity is as pronounced as it's likely to be, but the rigor mortis has worked down only to her knees. I may be able to tell the time exactly, once I get her on the table, but right now I'd say she's been dead about eight

hours. That's rough, mind you. You'll have to operate on the assumption that it could be as much as an hour either way."

I glanced at my watch. It was nine-thirty. "That would put it around one-thirty this morning, give or take an hour."

He nodded. "Better call it between midnight and three, and be on the safe side. I'll phone you later, if I can give you a closer estimate."

The roof door opened and the lab crew and photographer came through it and walked toward us. They needed no instructions. They said hello to the rest of us, and went straight to work with their chalk and tape measures and powders and cameras. They worked as a team, silently, with no lost motion and no lost words. Their appearance on the scene had brought a round of cheers from the rooftoppers and window-watchers.

"You'd think it was a floor show, and a new act had just come on," Rosie said. "Well, Steve, do you want me for anything else?"

"Guess not, Rosie. Thanks a lot."

"The only time I get any results is when they bring the girls in on a raid. Then there's some action. They soak their hair in a solution of dope and water, so they can rinse it out again once they're in the tank. And razor blades in their hair — my God, I must have found a thousand of them. And girls with big bills rolled into their garters. You men think you've got something when you get a prisoner with an ice pick tine hidden in his tie, don't you? Well, you should see some of the things the *girls* come up with. You'd never believe it." She waved to the group of men around the body and walked toward the entrance to the stairway.

A moment later, the assistant D.A. and two of the detectives attached to the D.A.'s office arrived. Walt and I briefed them, told them what we'd done so far, received the usual pep talk from the assistant D.A., assured him we'd wrap up a good case for him, and then the assistant D.A. and the detectives left. Their work — most of it — would come after Walt and I had got together enough of a case to take before the grand jury. It was Walt's and my job to conduct the investigation and find the killer. It was the job of the D.A.'s office and staff to make sure the killer was indicted, tried, and convicted.

The chief of the tech crew called to me. "She's all yours, Steve."

I got a receipt for the body from one of the ambulance attendants. Then he and his partner set up their collapsible stretcher, eased the girl onto it, and took her away.

"I'll go along now, too," the doc said. "Maybe I'll be able to schedule a fast autopsy for you, Steve."

"I'd appreciate it."

"I'll let you know." He followed the ambulance attendants toward the stairs.

Walt had been giving one of the

tech crew a hand with a tape measure, and now he came back to where I stood.

"You make another look around up here?" I asked.

"Uh huh. No go. Not even any fresh cigarette butts. The super back yet?"

"No. And neither is the switchboard operator. I talked to the guy who phoned in the squeal, though."

"Henderson?"

"Yeah."

"You get a make on the girl?"

"That's just about all I did get. Her name's Barbara Lawson. Henderson says she was a model."

"It figures. She was sure as hell pretty enough."

"She lived here in the building. I think we'd better go down and hit her flat, Walt."

"Fine. I've had enough of this roof. There's nothing more we can do here, anyway."

I told the tech chief Barbara Lawson's apartment number, in the event he should want us for anything, and Walt and I went down the fire stairs to the sixth floor. We got the complimentary treatment from the open doors along the corridor again, and stopped in front of 601.

"Spring locks on these doors?" Walt asked.

"Yeah. At least the one on Henderson's was." I took a strip of celluloid from my billfold, inserted it in the crack between the door and the jamb, and pushed the edge of the strip against the bevel of the bolt.

We stepped inside and closed the door behind us.

"Some layout," Walt said. "Maybe you and I should have gone in for modeling, Steve."

I figured that it would take roughly a year of my salary to furnish my apartment the way Barbara Lawson had furnished hers. It had the look that comes only when a top interior decorator is given a free hand and money is no object.

"I keep thinking about what the doc said about there not being enough blood," Walt said. "Maybe she lost some of it down here."

"I don't think so, Walt."

"Why not?"

"She was wearing that same dress when she was stabbed, of course. The position of the wounds and the slashes in the cloth showed that. If there'd been a heck of a lot of bleeding, her dress would have been soaked, no matter *where* she was killed."

"Yeah, I guess that's right. Let's give the place a look."

"Just a minute, Walt." I lifted the phone from the top of a gossip-seat, and when the patrolman I'd posted on the switchboard answered, I asked him if either the regular switchboard operator or the super had shown up yet. He said they had not. I told him Walt and I would be in 601 for a while and to let us know as soon as the switchboard operator or the super came in.

"I remember when I was a patrolman," Walt said as I hung up. "Running switchboards was the thing I hated most. I never did really catch on to it."

"Patrolmen are smarter these days," I said. "They learn faster and remember longer."

Walt nodded soberly. "You're so right," he said. "Now, so far as *you're* concerned —" He broke off as the phone rang. The officer on the switchboard was routing all incoming calls exactly as the regular operator would have done — except that he was monitoring every one of them. The same was true, of course, of outgoing calls.

I picked up the phone again. "Hello?"

There was a short pause on the other end of the line. Then a girl's voice said, "Is Barbara there?"

"Not right now. May I —"

"Who's speaking, please?"

"A friend of hers. Where can she call you back?"

Another pause. "Just tell her Ann Tyner called, please. Do you expect her back soon?"

"It's a little hard to say."

"Well, tell her it's important. I'll be home all day."

"You want to give me your number?"

"She knows it."

"All right."

"Thank you."

I dropped the phone back in its cradle and reached for the directory. There was no Ann Tyner listed, but there was an entry for a Wilma A. Tyner. I dialed the number. When the same girl answered, I hung up without saying anything. I looked at the address and entered it in my notebook. She lived at 917 West Seventy-second Street.

"Well, we've found a friend of hers," I said. "Or at least an acquaintance."

"We'd better get to talking to the tenants," Walt said. "There's going to be some terrific yelling done if we don't spring them pretty soon."

"I was just going to call the lieutenant and ask him for some more men," I said. "But I don't think I'll wait for that. We can send the patrolmen through the building, and if they come up with anything interesting, we can take over."

"That's not strictly according to the book," Walt said, grinning.

"Maybe not. But the precinct's already got two other murder investigations on its hands. If we drag in any more men on this one, it'll mean canceling a lot of the guys' leaves and days off. I'd like to avoid that, if we can."

"I'll get the boys off the roof," Walt said. "The techs can get along without them."

"Put one officer to work on each floor," I said. "Start with the top ones, and work down. I've already talked to Henderson, so they can skip him. Tell them to make the routine pitch. We might as well operate out of this apartment, so tell them the number and make sure

they understand they're to call here the minute they come up with anything."

"When can the tenants leave?"

"As soon as the officers have finished talking to them. Tell all the boys to keep an eye out for the knife." I thought a moment. "Maybe you'd better make one exception, Walt. Have a cop go down to the basement and make a thorough search for the knife down there. Have him check the back yard, all trash cans, and so on. And ask him to check all the manholes within two blocks of here. That'll take him some time, but if he should finish before the others have questioned all the tenants, you can put him to work helping them."

Walt grimaced. "Here's where I make some cop an enemy of mine."

"And on the other hand, he might find that knife and get a nice piece of paper in his record."

"Okay. I'll get started." He glanced about the apartment again as he opened the door. "This is the way everybody should live, Steve. You and me and everybody."

"It's a little frilly for the likes of you, Walt," I said.

"I could get used to it. You ought to see the trap Florence and I are living in now. Compared to this place, it's just a hole in the wall. I'd like to try this for a change."

"But think of the interesting life you lead. Think of all the adventure."

"Ha!" he said, and went outside.

4.

I didn't spend much time on Barbara Lawson's living room. I moved the furniture around enough to look under it, and I searched beneath the cushions on the twin sofas and the two deep chairs, but that was about the extent of it. There was a thick wall-to-wall rug, but there were no stains of any kind on it. Only a professional could have cleaned stains from a rug like that, and I was pretty sure that Miss Lawson had never lain on it or been dragged across it.

The bedroom took me a little longer. There was a large color photograph of the girl on one of the walls, with several smaller photographs of her arranged around it. There were no other photographs or pictures of any kind. I took a good look at the large color job. She was beautiful, all right, and of course the photograph was truer to the way she'd really looked than the face we'd seen on the roof.

The bed was made up, with a negligee thrown across the foot of it. The negligee looked like pale green mist. There were mules on the floor beside the bed, and a fashion magazine lay beside them. I looked beneath the bed, then walked to the dressing table and started going through the drawers. I wasn't interested in bottles and the usual paraphernalia you find around dressing tables. I was looking for letters, photographs — things like that.

But I didn't find any. You could search through the table for a week, and all you'd find out was that it belonged to a woman. You'd never find out which one.

I went through the two large closets, looking in every coat and suit pocket I came to. I found two sticks of gum and some small change, and that was all.

The kitchen gave me even less. There was very little food, either on the shelves or in the refrigerator, but there was a fine supply of very good liquor. And while there were no pots and pans, there were any number of mixed-drink glasses, some with shapes I couldn't remember seeing before.

I took a fast look at the bath, and then crossed to a small room which was fitted out in a lady's version of a den. There was a large leather reclining chair, a shelf of books, mostly autobiographies, and what must have been a hundred or so pictures of Barbara Lawson. Some were framed covers from magazines, and some were crayon and water colors, but most were photographs. All of the work was professional, and all of it was good. Most of them showed an even younger Barbara than the large color photograph in the bedroom. If she'd been beautiful when she died, she had been more than that when she was a little younger.

There was a long table on the side of the room opposite the bookshelf, covered with neat stacks of fashion and beauty magazines. There was a drawer in the table, and I opened it. I found a sewing kit and a flat wooden box about a foot wide and eighteen inches long. The box was locked, so I went back to the bedroom, got a bobby pin, and opened it. It contained a bank book and the stub section of a checkbook. The bank book showed no deposits had been made during the last ten months, and the checkbook stubs showed that the last check, entered about a week ago, had reduced the balanced in the account to $80.45.

I reached back into the drawer, felt around, and came up with three folded billheads. All three were from top stores, all for amounts between two and three hundred dollars, and one of them had the word *Please!* handwritten in red ink beneath the amount due. I put the book and stubs and billheads back in the wooden box and returned it to the drawer.

There was a knock at the hall door.

It was the chief of the tech crew. "We're through up there, Steve," he said. "This the girl's apartment?"

"Yeah."

"You want us to start in here now?"

"Might as well. You do any good for us on the roof?"

He lowered his heavy kit to the floor and shook his head. "Afraid not. There isn't anything up there that'd take a print, except the chimney. Those are glazed bricks, and usually they take a nice print." He shrugged, mopping at his fore-

head with a handkerchief. "God, it's hot."

"No prints on the bricks?"

"Nope. Few partials, but they were old as hell. There was a wine bottle lodged down between the two sections of the chimney, but it'd been there long enough to pick up a scum. No prints on it. We checked, just to get it down on the report. The only prints we got, Steve, are the ones we took off the girl's fingers." He turned back toward the corridor. "Well, I'll tell the gang to come down here and get started."

"All right. Walt and I are going to use this as headquarters, but we'll stay out of your way."

He grinned. "We'll do the same for you."

The phone rang. It was the officer I'd posted on the switchboard.

"The super just came in," he said.

"Good. Ask the officer on the elevator to bring him up here, will you?"

"Yes, sir."

"You hear anything interesting on that board?"

"No, sir. Lots of calls to explain why people will be late to work, and a couple to the newspapers to complain about police methods. That's about all."

"Uh huh. Well, call me if that switchboard operator shows up."

"Yes, sir."

The tech chief and his crew came into the apartment and went to work, and a few moments later Walt Logan came back to report that he'd assigned a patrolman to search for the knife, and that all the other officers, except the ones we'd posted, were questioning the tenants on the top three floors.

"Listen, Walt," I said. "I'm getting tired of waiting for that switchboard operator. The super's wife says he has a habit of showing up late, but this is too damned late."

"You think maybe he's got a real good reason this time, Steve? Like a dead girl, for instance?"

"Could be, I guess. But I want to see that guy bad, Walt. Those switchboard people know everything that's going on around a place like this. They see people coming in and going out, and they listen in on calls all the time. Of course, this guy wasn't on duty at the time the doc says the homicide took place, but he'll still know a lot about the girl's habits and acquaintances. If her killer came in before midnight, chances are the operator will remember him."

"You want me to round him up?"

"I think you'd better. The super came in. He's on his way up here now. But for every fact the super knows, the switchboard operator will know a hundred."

Walt nodded and turned to open the door.

"Wait a minute," I said. "Before you go on the prowl for that guy, take a run over to —" I paused long enough to glance at my notebook — "to 917 West Seventy-second Street.

You remember the girl that called here? Well, that's her address. We don't know enough about the dead girl yet, and maybe this other girl can help us out. It may take a while to get hold of the switchboard operator, so you'd better grab the girl first. Her name's Tyner."

"What's the apartment number?"

"Look on the mailboxes. She said it was Ann, but she's listed in the phone book as Wilma A."

"Anything else?"

"That'll do it for a while."

He opened the door just as the patrolman and the super came abreast of it. He stood back to let them in, gave me a mock salute, and left.

"You want me to stay here, sir?" the patrolman asked.

I shook my head. "No. Thanks, Sam."

"There are some reporters down in the lobby."

"You'll be taking Walt Logan down in the elevator. Tell him I said to give them a fast statement. He'll know how to handle it."

"Yes, sir." He hurried after Walt.

I turned back to the super. "How are you, Mr. Brokaw?"

He stared at me sullenly, a short, muscular, flat-featured man with pale skin that sagged away from his jowls and eyes — as if he had once been much heavier than he was now, had lost weight, and the skin had remained stretched and sagging. The bursted blood vessels around his nose and in his eyes showed he'd done his share of whiskey drinking in his fifty-odd years. He didn't seem drunk now, but he did appear to be suffering from a hangover.

"What's going on here in my house?" he asked. He spoke with scarcely any movement of his lips, and his voice had that deep huskiness that heavy drinkers sometimes have. "I come home, and the first thing that happens, I get stopped by a cop. Now I'm up here. For why?"

"I wonder if you'd mind stepping out into the kitchen with me, Mr. Brokaw? These men are trying to work here, and we're only in their way."

He muttered something beneath his breath, but he turned and followed me to the kitchen. I sat down at one end of the white enamel table and motioned him to the chair at the other. He sat down heavily and glanced about him.

"I hope this don't take long," he said. "Me, I got work to do."

"I know," I said. "I'll make it as short as I can."

"You going to tell me what the hell this is all about?"

"Did you know the girl who had this apartment, Mr. Brokaw?"

"*Had?* Hell, she's still got it. Nobody gets an apartment here, unless I give the word."

"Did you know her pretty well?"

He grasped the fingers of one big hand with the fingers of the other and began cracking his knuckles. "Yeah. I guess you'd say I know her pretty good. Why?"

"When's the last time you saw her?"

"Yesterday. I didn't see her to talk to, though. I just seen her leaving the building." He hunched forward in his chair, cracking the knuckles a little louder now. "What's the difference when I seen her? She in trouble?"

"Just let me ask the questions, Mr. Brokaw. It'll go faster that way."

"This sure ain't getting my work done."

"You know where the switchboard operator might be?"

"Benny? Listen, I never know where that guy is. Ever since he started working a double shift, he's been coming in late. The people that own this place have been warning him about it. But Benny — he don't listen to nobody. He's like a damn mule, Benny is."

"He's the only switchboard operator, I understand."

"Yeah, and we ain't going to have him long, the way he's been laying down on the job. We used to have two of them here, you know. One of them would work from eight till four, and the other one'd come on at four and work up till midnight. But the other guy quit — guess it's been all of two months ago now — and old Benny, he talked the owners into letting him work both shifts. Don't ask me how he done it — he just done it, that's all. Damn fool was putting in sixteen straight hours. 'Course he took a nip on his jug now and then, to help him along. He —"

"But you don't have any idea where he is now?"

"No — and I don't give a damn. Maybe they'll fire him for sure this time and we'll get somebody around here that'll show up mornings, like they're supposed to."

I drummed on the table top with my fingertips a moment. "Your wife tells us you weren't home last night, Mr. Brokaw."

The knuckle-popping stopped for a moment, then started up again. "So?"

"Mind telling me where you were?"

"I don't see where that's any of your goddamned business."

I took out my pack of cigarettes and extended it across the table to him. "Smoke, Mr. Brokaw?"

"I just smoke cigars. Listen, fella. What I do at night, and who I do it with — that's all up to me, understand? I don't have to answer to you, or any other copper." He half rose from his chair. "That plain enough for you?"

I put my cigarettes back into my pocket without lighting one.

"Miss Lawson was killed last night," I said casually, and watched closely for his reaction.

The hard-guy look left his face as quickly as if it'd been wiped off with a towel. He stared at me incredulously.

"You're horsing me, ain't you?"

I shook my head.

"Miss Lawson? She's dead?"

"Killed."

"Ahhh. Ahhh, no . . ."

I waited.

"How — how'd she get killed?"

I studied him. Generally, we tell people as little as we can, hoping that during the questioning they'll reveal knowledge which they could not have had if they were not in some way involved. But that's always up to the detective, and sometimes we hunch it differently and play it that way.

"She was stabbed to death. Up on the roof."

"Stabbed . . . My God . . . Who did it?"

"We don't know yet."

"You think I. . . ?"

"We would like to know where you were last night. Say, from midnight until three o'clock."

Brokaw put his hands on the table and folded them and stared at the thick, knobbed fingers. "I guess I'm kind of in the crack, ain't I?"

"What do you mean?"

"Well, it looks to me like I'm damned if I do and damned if I don't. If I don't tell you where I was, you'll take me over to the station house and slug the hell out of me. And if —"

"That'll be enough, Mr. Brokaw. You know better than that."

"Well, maybe so. Yeah, I guess I do know you wouldn't do that. But you sure wouldn't give me no rest."

I nodded. "It isn't likely."

"Yeah. But if I *do* tell you, then my wife's going to find out."

"Find out what?"

"That's just it. She's pretty damn sickly, you know. Never hardly even gets out of bed." He paused. "It ain't easy on a man, fella. I try to do right by her, but it sure ain't easy. There's times . . ."

"Is that what happened last night?"

"Yeah."

I got out my notebook. "Tell me the woman's name," I said.

"It ain't myself I care about so much," Brokaw said. "It's Maude. She drives herself pretty near crazy, just suspecting me of stuff like that. If she finds out I really done it . . . God, I think it'd damn near kill her. I ain't just talking, mister. Maude — she's sicker'n hell. Been that way forever, it seems like."

"We'll check it out, Mr. Brokaw. If it's as you say it is, the information will go no further."

He gave me the name and address, and I entered it in my notebook.

"How long were you there?" I asked.

"Well, let's see . . . I got there about ten minutes after eleven, I guess. A couple of minutes one way or the other. The reason I'm sure is because I called her at eleven o'clock sharp. I'd just looked at the clock, because Maude had yelled at me to know what time it was. She has to take her medicine at a certain time, you know."

"And what time did you leave?"

"Few minutes ago."

"You always call this woman before you go to see her?"

"Not unless I want to spend the night. Then I got to call her, to make sure it's agreeable."

"Didn't your wife overhear you talking to this other woman?"

"It ain't likely. Our apartment's laid out like they are in railroad flats, you know. Maude was back in the bedroom, and there are a couple rooms between that and the living room, where the phone is. And besides, I always use a sort of code when I call. I make out I'm calling a man, see? I pretend I'm calling a guy to see if there's going to be a poker game. I call this woman 'Mike' on the phone. She knows what I mean, when I ask if there's going to be a poker game. If she wants me over there all night, all right, I go. And if she doesn't, then I tell Maude there ain't no game. I do that just in case Maude ever *does* kind of tune in on me one of these nights."

"I see. What was your personal opinion of Miss Lawson?"

"You'd never find a finer girl than her, mister. They just don't come no better. I guess I liked her better than any woman tenant I ever had in this house. She never got snotty, the way a lot of these extra-pretty girls get."

"You see her often?"

"Quite a bit. She was just about the most helpless woman ever was born. Couldn't fix a thing. Had me up lots of times, to fix this and that. I didn't mind doing it, though. You just naturally like to help a person like her."

"You know where we might find the switchboard operator?"

"I sure don't. He's a funny one, Benny is. Don't say nothing to nobody. I did hear him say a couple of times that he walks to work. A fella like Benny, he's the kind would walk all the way from the Bronx, just to save subway fare."

I nodded. "I guess that'll be all for now, Mr. Brokaw."

He got to his feet slowly, glancing at the pocket where I keep my notebook. "You sure Maude won't get wind of where I was?"

"I'm sure."

"Yeah. Well, if there's anything I can do to help you find the one that done it, you let me know. Hear?"

"Thanks," I said. "We'll do that, Mr. Brokaw."

"I'm stronger than I look. You leave me alone with him five minutes. That's all — just five minutes. He won't stab any more girls like Miss Lawson, I guarantee you."

I got up and walked to the front door with him. "Benny's last name is Thomas, isn't it?"

"Yeah, that's it. Thomas."

"Who owns this apartment house, Mr. Brokaw?"

"Corbett Brothers. They got an office on Sixth Avenue."

"Well, thanks again."

He nodded and walked toward the elevator. I watched him until the

car came up and he got into it. The patrolman I'd posted in the car glanced at me questioningly.

"Mr. Brokaw's going down to his apartment," I said, making it just pointed enough for Brokaw to get the drift.

I wanted to check Brokaw's story immediately, of course, and I called the station house, gave the lieutenant the data, and asked if he would send a detective over to see the woman Brokaw had said he'd spent the night with. The lieutenant called a detective to the phone, and I repeated my request to him. He told me he would be able to check it out right away, and would call me back as soon as he finished. I thanked him and hung up. If the detective found any cause for suspicion, I would, of course, make a personal check.

I looked up the phone listing for Corbett Brothers and called their office. Although I identified myself as a police officer, the girl to whom I talked refused to give me Benny Thomas' home address. I wasn't surprised. People in personnel work get a number of calls from men impersonating police officers, and most of them are under strict orders to release personal information about employees to no one except when the one requesting the information goes to the office and positively identifies himself.

When I knew my attempt was hopeless, I hung up and called BCI. I asked for run-throughs on Gus Brokaw, Benjamin Thomas, and Edward Henderson. I'd been thinking about the man with the dark tan and the white hair ever since I'd talked to him. He hadn't struck me as the kind of man who'd go up on the roof every morning just to see if the Hudson River was still there.

The phone rang, and the officer on the switchboard told me there was a delivery boy downstairs with a package for Miss Lawson. I told him to send the boy up.

5.

I was waiting for him at the elevator. He was about nineteen, I judged, with the smallest features I'd ever seen on a man's face. He was only an inch or so shorter than I, and his head was of normal size, but his eyes and nose and mouth belonged to a boy of seven or eight. He was carrying a long white box, of the kind florists use for cut flowers.

"You Detective Manning?" he asked.

"That's right."

He smiled at me, a little weakly. "They told me downstairs you'd want to talk to me."

"Uh-huh." I dropped my cigarette in the sand urn near the elevator and gestured toward Barbara Lawson's apartment. "We can talk in there."

.He bobbed his head, still smiling that unsure smile, and walked toward the door.

The tech crew had finished their work in the living room and had gone into the bedroom. I motioned the delivery boy to a chair and sat down across from him. He kept staring through the open doorway to the bedroom where the techs were working. He wasn't smiling at all now, and his tiny, child's eyes were troubled.

"What's happened?" he asked.

"We'll get around to that in a minute," I said. He'd put the box on the floor beside his chair. I reached down and picked it up, shucked off the white ribbon, and glanced at the dozen or so roses it contained. Then I replaced the lid and the ribbon, and put the box down beside his chair again.

"You deliver flowers here often?" I asked.

"Yes, sir. Every day, except on week ends."

"You always bring them yourself?"

"Yes, sir. I mean, I do unless I'm off sick or something." He tried to look at me, but he couldn't seem to keep his eyes away from the techs. "Miss Lawson has a standing order with the shop. We send her a dozen roses — or whatever happens to be extra nice — every morning about this time."

"I see. You ever notice anything unusual on your deliveries?"

He moistened his lips. "Unusual?"

"Uh huh. Like Miss Lawson having an argument or a fight with someone. Like that."

"Oh." He shook his head and the wide forehead between the miniature eyebrows puckered a bit. "No, I never did. I don't remember ever seeing anyone else here with her. No, wait. . . . I did see another girl here once. But they weren't fighting or arguing or anything."

"Where's the shop you work for?"

"Across the street, up near the corner."

"You ever see Miss Lawson anywhere else but here? At a party, or in a bar somewhere — anything like that?"

"No, sir. Can I ask . . . I mean, has anything happened to her?"

"She's dead."

He looked at me for fully half a minute while the color seeped slowly from his face and the little boy's eyes grew smaller and brighter. "Jesus . . ." he said softly.

"What's your name?" I asked.

It took him a while to get the words out. "Roy. Roy Jackman."

"Did Miss Lawson seem like a pretty nice person to you, Roy?"

He rubbed the back of his hand across his forehead, as if to wipe the sweat from it, but I noticed that the wrist also brushed across his eyes, and I thought I knew the reason for it.

"She was the best," he said. "I looked forward to coming over here every day. How did she die?"

I told him.

It was a long time before he got control of himself. There wasn't much on the surface, but I knew

there must be plenty going on inside.

Suddenly his body stiffened and he sat up straight in his chair. "You know something?" he said, almost challengingly. "You know how she was? Well, I'll tell you. You might think I don't realize how I look to other people, but you're wrong. I do know. I know too damn well. But you think Miss Lawson ever let on I wasn't the best-looking fellow she ever saw? Not Miss Lawson. Why, the first time she opened her door and saw me, she smiled at me just like I looked like anybody else. Most people try to hide it — the way my face makes them feel, I mean. But she wasn't hiding anything. You know why? Because she didn't even *think* about it. *She didn't even care!* She . . ." He broke off, got to his feet so abruptly that he almost tripped, and headed for the door.

I let him go. I started once to call to him to take his flowers, but I thought better of it. I listened to him running down the corridor to the elevator, wondering if *my* own first thoughts about him had shown in *my* face. It left me feeling a little uneasy, a little guilty.

6.

Walt Logan called at five past twelve.

"I'm phoning from a drug store, Steve," he said. "I can't raise that Tyner girl. I hammered on her door for ten minutes, off and on."

"That's funny. She said she'd be home all day."

"Well, she changed her mind."

"What kind of building does she live in?"

"One of those converted brownstones. No desk, no switchboard, no elevator, no anything."

"All right. We'll forget her for a while."

"You want me to come back now?"

"No. Grab a bite to eat, and then go over to the Corbett Brothers Realty Company. That's on Sixth, in the Townley Building. You know where it is?"

"Yeah."

"Corbett Brothers owns this house here, and hires the switchboard operators. I called them to ask about Benny Thomas —"

"He hasn't shown up yet?"

"No. And Corbett Brothers wouldn't give me any information on him over the phone. But they'll give it out fast enough if you go over there in person. Nobody around here even knows where the guy lives. If you can get his home address, you'll have a start."

"What's Benny's last name again?"

"Thomas."

"Check. When are you going out to eat?"

"Right now. But I'll leave somebody here on the phone, in case you want to buzz me."

"Okay, Steve. I'll try to bring Benny back alive for you."

I hung up, left the apartment, and went down the fire stairs floor by floor until I found the sergeant in

charge of one of the two radio units. I told him I was going out for a sandwich and that I wanted him to stay in Barbara Lawson's apartment until I got back. He would answer the phone, take down all messages, and explain my absence to the skipper if he should happen to call for a progress report. The sergeant told me the apartment-by-apartment questioning was coming along in fine shape and that it should be completed before one o'clock. I asked if he wanted me to bring him a sandwich and some coffee from the restaurant, and when he said no, I started down the stairs again.

But I kept thinking about Edward Henderson. I'd had too little time to question him, before the arrival of the policewoman and the assistant M.E. I stopped where I was and turned back up the stairs again. The uniform men had finished questioning the tenants on the top floor, but there was a chance Henderson had not yet left his apartment. And if he had, it would give me an opportunity to make a search.

Henderson didn't answer my knock. I waited about half a minute, then tried again, and when he didn't answer the second time I got out my celluloid and let myself inside.

I made a very rapid search. I wasn't looking for anything in particular — though the knife that had been used to kill Barbara Lawson was always in the back of my mind, of course — and I limited myself to a quick circuit of the apartment and a hurried thumbing-through of papers and letters in the writing desk.

I didn't find anything that could tie Henderson in more closely with the dead girl. The only thing of interest in the desk was a sizable stack of pornographic pictures, but none of the pictures were of Barbara Lawson, and the only really unusual thing I'd found in the apartment was the sunlamp arrangement Henderson had rigged up in his bedroom. On the side of the room opposite the regular bed, he'd placed an army cot. The cot was covered with a white rubber sheet, and there was a thick pillow in a white rubber pillow case. Suspended directly over the middle of the cot hung one of the most expensive-looking sun lamps I'd ever seen outside of a health club. At the foot of the bed stood a television set, arranged so that Henderson could lie on the cot, absorb the rays from the sun lamp, and watch television programs. A metal footlocker lay on its side next to the cot, and on top of it were several fishing and hunting magazines, three pipes, a tobacco humidor, and two large, neatly folded blue towels.

I let myself out of the apartment, walked to the elevator, and let the patrolman take me down to the street.

I stopped at the first eating place I came to, a small cafeteria, and bought two beef sandwiches and a cup of coffee. I took the tray to a table with only two other diners at it, and sat down. I'd just started the

first of the sandwiches when a thought struck me. If the dead girl had been a model, then it stood to reason that many of her friends and acquaintances would probably be in the same or related lines of work. If Ann Tyner, the girl who'd called Barbara, happened to be a model too, the chances were that she would subscribe to some telephone answering service. Almost all professional people did, and free-lance professionals, such as models, almost invariably did.

I finished the sandwiches and coffee in a hurry, and then went back to the phone booth at the rear of the cafeteria. I dialed Ann Tyner's number, and got an answer before the second ring.

It was an answering service, and I was informed that Miss Tyner had told them she could be reached at Borden, Webb and Martin, an advertising agency between Forty-seventh and Forty-eighth Streets on Madison Avenue.

I lit a cigarette, mulling things over in my mind. I didn't much like the idea of going down to the advertising agency to talk to Ann Tyner; but on the other hand, Walt and I had come up with nothing so far to indicate that the dead girl had any enemies or that there'd been anyone in her life who might have had sufficient motive to kill her. She *could* have been murdered by almost anyone in New York, of course, and for almost any imaginable reason — but what we were looking for was someone who had a reason to do it. We needed to find someone who knew her, and knew her well. So far, we hadn't found anyone who could tell us even as much as her next of kin.

The one certain thing was that Walt and I couldn't sit around and wait for the murderer to come in and sit down in our lap. We had a little circumstantial suspicion, of course, in connection with Edward Henderson and Benny Thomas — and with the super, Gus Brokaw, until we could check his story — but that's all it was: circumstantial. And before we got much further, we'd have to know a lot more about the girl herself.

I called the sergeant I'd posted in the apartment, told him where I was going, that I should be back within an hour or so, and then walked to the station house to check out an RMP car. I never phone people before I go to question them. Whether they're guilty of involvement or not, it gives them time to anticipate questions and think up the right answers. And the 'right' answers, for the person you want to interrogate are sometimes far different from the ones you get when you hit them cold. No one likes being questioned by police, and even wholly innocent people can twist the truth into some pretty fantastic shapes. The ideal situation occurs when the person to be questioned has absolutely no inkling that he *is* to be questioned — until the interrogation actually begins.

Walt and I, of course, had been taken off the regular duty roster the moment the skipper knew we had drawn a homicide. We would be on special detail until the case was disposed of, relieved of all other duties and investigations, and expected to stay on the job day and night until we'd finished it. If we got any sleep at all, it would have to be during one of the infrequent lulls which sometimes occur when detectives have done everything they can and must wait for developments beyond their control.

I got the white-topped Ford under way and headed downtown to talk to Ann Tyner.

## 7.

The receptionist at the advertising agency directed me to the photographic studios on the fifth floor. There were several sets and props scattered about, but people were working at only one of them. I walked over and asked a young man in a blood-red waistcoat and pink slacks to point out Ann Tyner to me. He indicated one of four girls grouped around a washing machine. All four were very pretty, all wore simple housedresses, and all looked down at the washing machine with varying degrees of ecstasy. I started forward.

"Hold it a minute, buddy," the man in the red waistcoat said. "They're ready for the take."

I nodded, watching while another man trucked a large color camera an inch or so closer to the group, ducked his head beneath a black cloth, and yelled, "Now!" There was a blinding flash of white light, the camera shutter made a small thumping sound, and instantly the girls' ecstasy changed to boredom and they moved away from the washing machine.

I walked over to the girl who'd been pointed out to me as Ann Tyner.

"Miss Tyner?" I asked.

She started a smile, then noticed that I couldn't be anyone of importance to her, and let the smile go. "Yes?" She was blue-eyed, with very short dark hair and a body that looked as if it would never grow used to housedresses.

I identified myself. She glanced at my card without any change in expression. The other girls had gone over to talk to the cameraman.

"I'd like to talk to you for a few minutes," I said.

"Can you wait till I get out of this damned dress? I feel like Mother Hubbard."

"This won't take long."

She shrugged. "Well, at least let's sit down. I've been standing in front of that stupid washing machine for almost an hour." She indicated a couple of kitchen chairs that had been part of the set for the photograph. "Over there."

I followed her and we sat down.

"Now," she said. "What did you want to talk to me about?"

"You're a friend of Barbara Lawson's, aren't you?"

"I know her."

"How well?"

"Well enough to want to know why you ask."

"She a *particular* friend of yours?"

"Yes, she is. Why?"

"I hope you won't mind if *I* ask the questions, Miss Tyner. It's usually best that way."

"Listen. Barbara's my best friend. If something's happened that concerns her, I want to know about it. You can save that hard-cop talk for somebody else. What's wrong?" She still hadn't changed her expression very much, and she hadn't raised her voice at all, but I could sense that she was alarmed.

"I'm sorry," I said, "but we'll have to do it my way."

"That's right. It's always the cop's way, isn't it?"

"Do you know most of Barbara's friends, Miss Tyner?"

"I know all of them."

"Can you tell me if she has any serious enemies?"

"Well, this racket is a good place to breed them. It's strictly dog eat dog, and naturally Barbara . . ." She paused. "Something awful's happened to her, hasn't it?"

"Just answer the question, please."

She stared at me, biting at her lip. There was an almost imperceptible sheen of perspiration on her forehead and her eyes seemed to have grown a little darker.

"She isn't the kind to have really serious enemies. She always goes out of her way to avoid trouble with the other girls. Other models, I mean. There's always a lot of spatting and feuding going on in this business, but she never takes any part in it. Now tell me what's hap —"

"Do you know any of the men she went out with?"

She leaned toward me, studying my face intently. "You said 'went out with' — not '*goes* out with' but 'went.' "

"Well, I —"

"Does that mean she's — that she's dead?"

There's a limit. "Yes," I said. "She was killed last night."

Ann Tyner caught her lower lip between her teeth and I heard the sudden, sharp hiss as she drew in her breath.

"How?" she whispered finally. "How was she killed?"

"She was stabbed."

"Murdered? Barbara? Oh, no . . . Oh, no . . ."

"I'm sorry to bring the news," I said. "But these things happen and —"

"But who — who could have done such a thing?"

"We don't know," I said. "But we'll find out."

Her eyes narrowed a trifle. "Good lord! Maybe I even talked to him."

"What do you mean?"

"I called her this morning. I knew she didn't have any assignments, and neither did I, and I

thought we might spend the day together. Anyhow, when I called, a man answered the phone. He sounded funny — you know, like there was something wrong with his being there. He said Barbara wasn't there, and I asked him to have her call me. But then I got an emergency call to fill in on this picture, and I had to leave."

"I answered the phone," I told her. "I was there in the apartment when you called."

"Oh . . . I see."

"I know this is rough on you, Miss Tyner, but the more you can tell us about Barbara Lawson, the sooner we may catch the person that killed her."

"It was a man, wasn't it?"

"Not necessarily. The odds kind of look that way, but there's no reason to be sure."

"I wish I had a drink."

"Time's very important just now, Miss Tyner."

"Yes . . . yes, of course. Just what do you want to know?"

"Everything you can tell me. What kind of person she was, the people she ran around with, any habits that might have thrown her in with dangerous characters. Say she used dope or gambled or was playing around with some other woman's husband — I'd want to know about it. We'll find out anyway, but the sooner we know the sooner we can break the case."

She took a handkerchief from the front of her housedress and touched it to the inner corners of her eyes. "There wasn't anything like that. She'd take a drink now and then, but she certainly never used anything stronger. And she never went out with a married man in her life, that I know of. It'd be ridiculous. Why she could pick and choose from . . . from *just hundreds* of them."

I got out my notebook. "We'll have to have a positive identification. Can you tell me her next of kin?"

"She doesn't — didn't have any relatives here in New York. She was from Kansas City, Missouri. I think her brother's still there. Her mother and father are dead, I know. She said once that that's all the family there was, just she and her brother."

"That her real name — Barbara Lawson?"

"Yes."

"You know her brother's first name?"

"Alan. She talked about him all the time."

"We'll contact him. What else can you tell me? Just remember that everything's important."

She sat staring at the wadded handkerchief a moment. "Well, she didn't concentrate on any one man. She liked modeling, and she wanted to stay in it a few years yet before she settled down. She'd already been in it quite a while, because she started when she was only seventeen. She did a lot of juvenile work."

"Was she pretty successful?"

"She used to be. But it isn't like being an actress or a singer or something like that. After you've been in it a few years, say four or five, the agencies think people are tired of your face. Then you have to start taking just about anything you can get. Barbara was as pretty as anybody, and she was only twenty-one, but she'd been around quite a while."

"It was getting a little tough, then?"

"Well, yes. The really good assignments were getting farther apart — but she could have worked for another two or three years. No matter what kind of modeling she did, it would still have paid her more than she could make almost anywhere else. And she wasn't trained for anything else, you know. It was either model or get married, and she wasn't quite ready to get married yet."

"Let's get back to her men friends. You ever hear any of them threaten her, or did she ever tell you about a threat?"

"No. Like I said, she didn't go out with any one man in particular. When a man would start to get serious about her, she'd shy away from him. You know. She'd just keep turning him down when he asked for dates, until he gave up."

"Any of these men take it hard?"

"I guess maybe they did, but she never said anything about it. I think she would have told me, if any of them had threatened her or anything."

"You'd needn't be hesitant about this, Miss Tyner. We'll keep what you say confidential."

"There isn't much to tell. She led a pretty normal life, I'd say. She got along with almost everybody, and everybody seemed to like her. She — she was one of the nicest girls in this town, she really was." Her voice was strained now. "I — I feel a little sick. I think I'll go home."

"I have a police car downstairs. I'll drop you off if you like."

"Thanks. Just give me a minute to get out of this dress."

It took her closer to five, and when she came back in a blouse and skirt, carrying her man's hat box, I noticed she'd been crying.

I kept questioning her, as gently as I could, all the way uptown to West Seventy-second Street. It didn't add anything to what I already knew. I let her out of the RMP in front of her brownstone and had just started away from the curb when she came running back to the car.

"I just this second remembered something," she said breathlessly.

"Good. What is it?"

"There *was* somebody who bothered her. Somebody who wouldn't take no for an answer, I mean. But all this was months ago, and I'd forgotten about it. It was somebody from her home town, from Kansas City. She met him when she went

home on a visit. He must have fallen pretty hard, I guess, because he followed her here to New York. She tried to stop him, but he wouldn't listen. She said he even quit his job so he could come."

"This was several months ago, you say?"

"Four or five."

"What happened?"

"He got her phone number and address from the directory and kept calling her up and waiting for her outside her building. Once he even went up and waited for her in front of her apartment. But she wouldn't let him in, and she wouldn't go out with him, and finally he called and told her he was going back to Kansas City."

"She ever mention him to you again?"

"Yes, she did. That's just what I'm getting around to. He showed up again . . . let's see . . . it was about two weeks ago. She said he'd called her and begged her to let him see her, and that she felt sorry for him, but she just couldn't stand him and she didn't want to let him think she was encouraging him. She told me he was crying on the phone, and everything, but that she didn't know what else to do."

"What was his name?"

"Carl. I don't know his last name. She mentioned it a couple of times, but I just can't seem to remember it."

"Did she appear to be afraid of him?"

"No. If she had, I would have thought of him right off when you asked about men threatening her. No — she seemed to just feel sorry for him, because he'd worked himself up so, and all, but she never hinted that she thought there was any harm in him. He was kind of a nuisance, and he embarrassed her, I guess, but I'm pretty sure she wasn't afraid of him."

"We'll get on it right away," I said. "Thanks very much, Miss Tyner."

"You think he could be the one?"

"He sounds pretty good, from what you've told me. We'll see what he's got to say."

"If there's anything I can do for Barbara, will you let me know? Maybe you'd want me to pack her things . . . or something . . ." She turned her head away quickly.

"We'll let you know if there's anything like that," I said.

She nodded, without saying anything, and walked slowly back toward her brownstone.

## 8.

It was almost three o'clock when I got back to Barbara Lawson's apartment. The uniform sergeant who had been subbing for me said I'd had calls from both the BCI and the detective I'd asked to check the super's alibi for me. I called the detective first. He told me Gus Brokaw had been where he'd said he had been. The detective had

checked with the woman and her common-law husband, and he was convinced that Walt and I could cross Brokaw's name off our list of suspects. He had told the vice men about the woman and her husband, and the pair would be placed under surveillance by detectives specializing in vice work.

I called the BCI and found that they had no package or prints on Edward Henderson or Gus Brokaw, but that they did have a package and prints on the switchboard operator, Benjamin Thomas. Thomas' rap-sheet extended back to 1937, showing six jail terms for disorderly conduct, four for vagrancy, one for unauthorized use of an automobile, two for petit larceny, and one for felonious assault. He'd finished the sentence for felonious assault in April of 1951, and there was no record of his having been in trouble since then.

The tech crew had finished and gone back to Headquarters. I called the crew's chief and asked him to match Benny Thomas' prints with those the crew had lifted in Barbara Lawson's apartment. He told me they were already at work on it, because BCI had told him as soon as they'd pulled the package on Thomas and seen the rap-sheet, and that he'd let me know if they made a match.

The uniform sergeant had been watching me as I talked on the phone.

"The boys finished talking to the tenants," he said. "I put them to looking for the knife. They're spreading out all over the neighborhood. Okay?"

"Yeah, fine, Lew. We want that knife the worst way there is."

"We figured the guy might have thrown it off the roof. Some of the boys are looking on the other roofs around here. If some citizen hasn't picked it up, we'll find it — that's if the guy didn't keep it with him, of course."

"Good."

"I made sure the boys all had something to eat first."

"How about you?"

"I could stand to lose a little weight."

I grinned and gestured toward the door. "Not today. Go down and get yourself something to eat, Lew."

"Wouldn't hurt me any, I guess."

After the sergeant left, I called Headquarters again and asked for the Correspondence Bureau. I told them we'd discovered a next-of-kin for Barbara Lawson, gave them her brother's name, and explained that we hadn't been able to get a street address but that he lived in Kansas City, Missouri. The CB would take care of the details. They'd contact the Kansas City police by phone or teletype, ask them to notify Alan Lawson of his sister's murder, and request instructions for disposition of the body.

But I had additional business with the CB this time. I asked them to have the Kansas City police check

with Lawson to find whether he knew a man named Carl, last name unknown, who had been acquainted with Barbara and followed her to New York. I made sure that Lawson would be told he must keep this last item strictly confidential. I was especially interested in Carl's last name, hoping that he might still be in New York.

Walt came in just as I was hanging up the phone.

"Our boy's flown the coop, Steve," he said.

"Benny Thomas?"

"Yeah. I got his home address from the rental agency easy enough. He had a furnished room on Twelfth Street. When I got down there, he'd moved out and his room had already been rented to somebody else."

"You talk to the landlady?"

"It's a landlord. Yeah, I talked to him. He said Benny came in about eight-thirty this morning, paid him a couple bucks he owed him, and said he was moving. The landlord seemed pretty hurt that Benny'd move out on him. I got the impression he was sort of fond of him. Anyhow, he said the money was in payment of a personal loan, not back rent or anything. He told me Benny never caused any trouble, never went over on his rent, and was always helping the landlord do little odd jobs around the rooming house. The landlord's pretty old — about seventy-five or eighty."

"I just talked to BCI," I said. "They've got a package on him.

"Bad?"

"Bad enough. Mostly dis-con and vag, but he did bits on two P.L. raps and another on a felonious assault."

Walt whistled softly. "And now the guy turns up missing on the same morning our girl turns up dead."

"Uh huh."

"Maybe this is it, Steve. You want to lay any bets?"

"Not me. I've been in this job too long."

"You going to get out an alarm for him?"

"Sure. Right now." I called the CB, asked them to get a description of Benjamin Thomas from BCI and put out an alarm for him. The alarm would go out over the teletype to every station house in New York. It would be broadcast to every RMP car and every police radio station. If the first alarm didn't result in Thomas' apprehension, I'd ask for its big brother — the alarm that went to the police in every city of any size in thirteen states and the District of Columbia.

"You seen the papers yet?" Walt asked.

"No. They playing it big?"

"You'll never see them play anything bigger. What they haven't got in story, they've got in pictures. It looks like all the papers are having a contest to see who can print the most pictures of her. They must have gone to her agent and carried back glossies in a truck."

"This case has what it takes, all right. The sheets should do real well with it."

"And of course there's a couple of editorials giving us the needle."

I smiled. "So soon?"

"Well, they had it handy — from the last time."

"We've got only about twenty thousand cops in this town, Walt. We need forty thousand. That's the story and the answer — no matter who says what."

"I think we'll keep them happy on this one. Five will get you ten that Benny Thomas is our boy."

"He'd look a lot better to me if I hadn't just talked to Ann Tyner."

"You get her over here?"

I told him how I'd located Ann, and filled him in on what she'd said about the man named Carl who had followed Barbara Lawson from Kansas City to New York.

"Those odds on Benny Thomas just went down," Walt said.

"Barbara had a brother in Kansas City," I said. "That's where she met this guy Carl, on a visit to her brother a few months ago. The brother seems to be all the family she had. Communications is notifying him, and at the same time they're having the Kansas City police ask him about Carl."

"Anybody find the knife yet?"

"No. Lew's got the patrolman going over the neighborhood. They finished questioning the tenants quite a while ago."

Walt glanced at his wrist watch. "I guess I'd better call Florence and tell her I won't be home for dinner tonight. It won't do any good, though."

"Why not?"

"Because she'll cook just as big a dinner anyway. She'll even set a place for me, exactly the way she always does."

"I don't get it, Walt."

"Funny thing. About three years ago I called her up and told her I had to work and wouldn't be home to eat. So about twenty or thirty minutes after that, a guy walks into the station house, confesses to the armed robbery I'm working on, hands me the gun, puts the other guy's billfold down on my desk, and says lock him up. Just like that. The guy's psycho, you see — a real nut. So then I call in the man who'd made the squeal. He identifies the holdup man, identifies his billfold — and that's that. All over in about half an hour. I put the boy in the tank and hit for home. When I get there, Florence has warmed up a can of soup for herself and is just finishing it when I walk in." He spread his hands and shrugged. "So ever after that, she goes right ahead and fixes a big dinner anyhow."

"Then what's the point in calling her, Walt?"

"Because she'd raise hell if I didn't, that's why."

I watched him as he lifted the phone and began to dial, and then I left the apartment and climbed the metal stairs to the roof. I walked

over to the parapet that faced toward the Hudson, thinking about the trips Edward Henderson had said he made every morning just to look down that way. There might have been worse views of the river, but I'd never seen them.

I turned and looked toward the spot where Barbara Lawson's body had lain. The place was in the shade of the chimney now. The chimney itself was one of these twin affairs, actually two chimneys, but built very close together and mounted on the same three-foot-high foundation. The top of the double chimney was about ten or eleven feet above the level of the roof.

I hurried back to the apartment.

"Listen, Walt," I said, "did you check that chimney up there?"

"Chimneys, Steve. There are two of them."

"Have it your own way. Did you check them?"

"Why, no. Hell, Steve, they're too tall. You couldn't get up there without a ladder. And if *we* couldn't, then nobody else could have, either."

"But you *could* toss a knife into one of them, Walt."

"I thought of that. It'd be almost impossible, though. Those things are a good ten feet high. You'd be lucky to get a knife to fall in one of them in less than a couple of dozen throws. And every time you missed, you'd have a clatter on the roof. The guy would have been afraid of attracting attention from some of the windows around here, Steve. Who's going to stand up there, trying to put a knife in the top of a chimney, like a basketball player, for God's sake?"

"Let's check it, anyhow."

He shrugged. "You're the boss."

"Phone the super and ask him to bring a ladder up here."

Fifteen minutes later, I stood on the top of a stepladder, held firmly by Walt and the super, and threw a flashlight beam into the first of the two chimney stacks. There was nothing as far down as I could see. I climbed down to the roof, rearranged the ladder, and went up again to look into the second stack.

I found it had been plugged with cement, about four feet from the top. On the cement lay a large bath mat. I pulled the mat from the chimney and dropped it down to the roof. There was no knife in the chimney.

I climbed down, told Gus Brokaw he could return the ladder to the basement, and then Walt and I examined the bath mat. It was quite new, obviously had not been in the chimney long, and was stained with something that was almost certainly dried blood.

"Looks like the doc was right," Walt said. "The Lawson girl got knifed in her apartment, and then the guy dragged her up here. But why in hell would he bring this thing along?"

"To keep from getting blood on his clothing," I said.

"And on the floor along the way.

He probably wrapped it around her, over the knife wounds."

"Probably."

"What I'd like to know is why he bothered bringing her body up here in the first place. And why would he go to the trouble of stuffing the mat in the chimney?"

"Why he brought her up here is anybody's guess," I said. "But the reason he wanted to hide the mat might be because he didn't know we couldn't lift prints off it. It's pretty big, and it would be hard to wipe clean, and so he might have thought the chimney was the quickest way to play safe."

"I see how he could have done it," Walt said. "If he stood on that foundation the chimney rests on, and reached as high above his head as he could, he would have been able to push the mat across the top bricks toward the opening."

"We'd better get the mat over to the lab. The guy probably took the knife with him. I don't think he'd climb up on this side of the chimney and drop the mat inside, and then climb up on the other side and drop the knife. If he'd wanted to get rid of the knife, he would just have tossed it in after the mat."

"You want me to take the mat to the lab?"

"We'll ask them to send for it."

9.

We received the autopsy report at half-past four. Barbara Lawson had died from two stab wounds in the heart, one in the left ventricle and the other in the right auricle. The third wound, in her side, would not have been fatal, the knife having been deflected by a rib. She had not been under the influence of alcohol or narcotics at the time of death, and there was no evidence of a sexual assault. Fingernail scrapings showed no body tissue, which meant she hadn't tried to scratch anyone, and there were no indications that she'd suffered violence of any kind prior to the first knife thrust. The assistant M.E. had been unable to tighten up his original estimate as to the time of death, and it still remained at somewhere in the period between midnight and three A.M.

A few moments later we received the report from the Bureau of Criminal Identification. They'd checked Benny Thomas' prints against those they'd lifted in the apartment, with no success.

And ten minutes later, a patrolman brought in the knife. At least we hoped it was the knife. It was a bone-handled snap-up knife with a six-inch blade. There were dark stains in the places where a knife would be difficult to wipe clean; and while very small amounts of dried blood are difficult to distinguish from certain other kinds of stains, the chances were fairly good that blood was what it was. The patrolman had found the knife in a manhole, near the intersection of Sixty-ninth and Columbus Avenue.

"You don't see many switchblade knives with blades as long as that one," Walt said. "Not any more."

"It's pretty worn," I said. "Probably an old-timer."

"It'd be almost impossible to trace, wouldn't it?"

"Almost. We'd have to give it a try, though, if everything else deadended on us."

Both the patrolman and I had been handling the knife by holding it with thumb and forefinger touching only diagonally opposite edges of the handle, to avoid superimposing our own prints on any that might already be there on the flat surfaces. I handed it back to him carefully and asked him to rush it to the police lab for a print job and an analysis of the dark stains. Then I entered his name and badge number in my notebook, so that later on I could make sure he got a paper in his personal file.

The next phone call was from the skipper.

"These reporters are giving me a bad time, son," he said. "Give me something to get them off my back."

I told him as much as I could, knowing he'd decide just how much to release to the press. Chances were he'd give the reporters all of it, with the understanding that certain items were off the record until he gave the green light.

"The realty company sent over another switchboard operator," Walt said. "I saw him on my way up. He's standing by down there, waiting for the officer to give up the board."

I checked the time. "It's almost five o'clock," I said. "I think we might as well clear out of here. All the patrolmen are due for relief in a few minutes. This would be a good time to break camp."

"That squad room's going to be hard to take, after this place."

"We'd better send somebody over to the morgue for an identification," I said. "We might as well nominate the super. He's handiest."

"I don't guess I have to ask who's nominated to cart him over there and back."

"That's right. And kind of hurry it up, will you, Walt?"

"Any other little things I can do for you, before I die of hard work?"

"Uh-huh. Look up Lew and tell him to release everybody."

"No stakeouts?"

"No."

"After I bring the super back from the morgue, I go straight to the station house, right?"

"And bring some coffee along. I've got a hunch we're going to have some action on that alarm for Benny Thomas, and we ought to be hearing from Kansas City any time now."

We left the apartment and rode the elevator down to the ground floor. Walt headed toward the basement after Gus Brokaw, for the trip to Bellevue, and I crossed over to the switchboard. I told the officer

posted there that Walt and I had decided to close up shop and that he could return to the station house to report out.

The new switchboard operator the realty company had sent out seemed very nervous. It was understandable. It was not only his first day on a new job, but he had to take over from a policeman in a house where a murder had been committed only a few hours ago. I explained to him that there would be incoming calls for Barbara Lawson's apartment, and that such calls were to be routed to the detective squad room at the Twentieth Precinct station house. I gave him the phone number, and a little encouragement, which he plainly needed, and went out to my RMP car.

There was quite a crowd of people out front, and there would probably be a larger one soon, now that it was nearing quitting time in most of the stores and offices. And there would be the usual traffic problem caused by people driving past the apartment building just for a look at the front of it. But all this was out of my department. Both the congestion on the sidewalk and the additional traffic would be handled by the uniform squad as a matter of routine, just as the squad would handle any other problem.

10.

Back in the squad room once again, I rolled the original Complaint Report form into my typewriter and added some of the data from my notebook. When I had finished with the Complaint Report, I made up a folder for it, entered Barbara Lawson's name and the necessary coding on the file tab, and placed the folder in the section of the files reserved for homicides.

Her file would begin to build rapidly now. There would be supplemental reports, prepared on DD-5 forms, coming in from everyone working on the case, including the laboratory technicians, photographer, detectives on the D.A.'s staff, and others, as well as the ones which Walt and I would prepare from time to time. I hoped that we would soon be able to prepare a DD-14, the Résumé of Homicide Case form, which is filled out when a case is closed.

Headquarters called at six o'clock to say that they'd been unable to contact Barbara's brother in Kansas City. The Kansas City police had checked at both his home and at the office where he worked, but it had been Alan Lawson's day off and none of his acquaintances knew his whereabouts. The Kansas City police would stay on it, of course, and notify us as soon as the brother was located.

Walt Logan came in, carrying two cardboard containers of coffee.

"You look a little down in the mouth, Steve," he said. "Anything happen while I was at the morgue?"

"Headquarters just called. Kan-

sas City hasn't found Barbara Lawson's brother yet. That's bad, because until they do find him we won't be able to get a line on this guy Carl."

"The Tyner girl didn't have any idea of his last name at all?"

"She couldn't remember."

"My own memory isn't so good sometimes. I got them to put sugar in your coffee again."

"I'll drink it anyhow."

"That super was one sad guy when I took him over there. You'd think it was his own daughter."

"A lot of people were fond of her, it seems."

The lab called at six-twenty to report that the stains on the knife were blood, and that the blood was type "O" — which was the same type as Barbara Lawson's. There had been no prints. I asked them to return the knife to me.

"It was blood, all right," I told Walt. "And it could be Barbara Lawson's. But "O" is the most common type, and it doesn't really prove anything, except that *somebody* with type "O" was cut with it. Wouldn't mean anything in court."

"I'm sold," Walt said.

"Sure. So am I. But *we* won't be prosecuting the case."

The coffee Walt had brought back was none too hot, and I drank steadily. I'd crossed the room to drop the carton in a wastebasket when two patrolmen came in, escorting a very short, very thin, hawk-faced man of about forty-five.

"This is Benjamin Thomas," one of the patrolmen said. "We spotted him coming out of a bar on Amsterdam." He grinned down at Thomas and then winked at Walt and me. "He put up one hell of a fight, but we finally subdued him."

Benjamin Thomas smiled. He had a pleasant, bland face, faded gray eyes with a heavy tracery of laugh lines around them, and was dressed in a fresh white shirt, dark tie, and sharply creased brown suit. "I would have been able to handle these two easily," he said. "I just didn't want to embarrass them." He opened the gate in the wooden railing, came in inside, and sat down on the straight chair beside my desk. "It's good to be in a squad room again. Just like old times."

I glanced at the patrolmen. "Better stick around a few minutes, boys." They sat down on the bench near the hall door, watching Benny Thomas.

"Now, Mr. Thomas," I said.

"Yes?"

"You know why we want to talk to you, don't you?"

"Well, I do look at a newspaper now and then."

"You knew the Lawson girl?"

"Yes, of course. To speak to, that is. A lovely girl."

"Your record goes back to 1937, Benny."

"Yes, and it stops — and stops dead — in 1951."

"You did a bit for assault. What weapon did you use?"

"A fifth of whiskey. That is, it *was* a fifth of whiskey, until after I'd hit the man once or twice. Then it was just an empty bottle with no bottom to speak of. Unfortunately, I kept right on using it. . . . Lost my head in the heat of battle, you know."

"Next thing to a knife, wasn't it, Benny?"

"Even better, I'd say."

"We understand you moved out of your room this morning."

"That's right. Bag and baggage."

"Why?"

"I found a much nicer place, and I needed more room."

"That a new suit?"

"Just bought it. Haven't had it on more than three or four hours."

"You ruin the other one, Benny? Get stains on it, or anything?"

His smile widened. "I'm enjoying this more than you are. But if you grow tired of sparring around with me, let me know."

"All right. Tell us where you were this morning, between midnight and three o'clock, and how you can prove it."

"I can do a little better than that," he said. "I can tell you where I was between *ten* last night and *eight o'clock* this morning." He adjusted his chair so that he could face Walt as well as me.

"Suppose you do that," I said.

"Well, if you'll go to 873 West Eightieth Street, apartment 4-B, you'll meet a very charming woman."

"And?"

"And you'll discover she's my wife. But that isn't all. You'll also meet two very nice young ladies — teen-agers, but quite nice. They're my daughters. We were together last night. All four of us. From ten o'clock, right on through till this morning. We hadn't seen one another in some years, you know, and so we had an all-night reunion." He paused long enough to turn a friendly smile toward the two officers who'd apprehended him. "I haven't even been to bed yet, which is why I stopped in the bar for a bracer."

I stared at him a long moment.

"Would you like to hear more?" Benny asked.

"A great deal more, Benny."

"Good. I like talking about my family. You see, I've been trying to get my wife and daughters back for a very long time now. Ever since I left the walls, in fact. She — my wife — finally agreed. I think my daughters must have worked on her until she gave in. They think the world of me, those girls. Anyway, when my wife gave me the good news, I rented this apartment on Eightieth Street. I'd been hoping and planning for this so long, you know, and I'd saved every dime I could. I've held at least two jobs at a time ever since I came out of the walls. That switchboard job, for instance. I worked a double shift there. And I did all that so I'd have enough cash on hand to set my family up properly — if and when.

I looked at Walt a moment. Neither of us said anything.

"They arrived at the apartment at a quarter of ten last night," Benny Thomas said. "I'd given my wife the key, and she called me as soon as they got there. And I — well, I simply got up from the switchboard and went home. I knew I would be fired for it, but I didn't care at all. And that, naturally, is why I didn't show up for work this morning."

"You left at a quarter of ten?"

"Yes. And it so happens I know the cab driver who took me over to the apartment. His name's Johnny Webber, and he works for Pyramid Cabs. You can check with him, which will show the time I left the switchboard. And I know you'll enjoy meeting my wife and daughters when you ask them about my whereabouts for the rest of the evening."

"All this seems to amuse you, Benny," I said.

"Perhaps it *seems* to — but have you thought about what this will do to my wife and girls? Here they come back to me, after all these years, and the first thing that happens is that detectives start questioning them about me. . . . And about a *murder*, at that. It's going to queer things good for me, don't you think?" He was still smiling — and for the first time since he'd started talking, I realized he wasn't just trying to be a wise guy. If his story was true — and I had a strong feeling it was — little Benny Thomas was giving us all a lesson in how to roll with the punches.

"We'll have to check, Benny," I said.

"I know."

I glanced at Walt. "How about it, Walt? You want to take a run up to Eightieth Street?"

Walt got to his feet. "What's that address again, Benny?"

"Eight-seventy-three. Apartment 4-B."

Walt left to check out Benny's alibi, and I told the two patrolmen they could go back to their posts. Benny moved over to sit by the window, gazing down at the traffic in the street below. It was hard not to think about Benny and his family, and how it is that innocent people are often hurt in the course of investigations such as this one.

A messenger from the lab returned the snap-up knife to me at half-past seven, and at seven-forty Headquarters called to say they had the Kansas City police department on the wire.

I talked to a Sergeant Dabney. He told me they had located the dead girl's brother, and that the brother was taking the next plane to New York. The brother had said he knew of only one person named Carl, and that this man had crashed a party given for Barbara Lawson while she had been home on her visit several months before. He had never seen the man before, did not know his last name, or anything else

about him. He had, however, given the Kansas City police the names of other men and women who had been at the party, and the police were now checking the list in the hope of finding someone who did know Carl's last name and where to find him. Sergeant Dabney asked if I wanted the man held, pending further instructions from us, and I said that I did. He then asked if I wanted the Kansas City to conduct a preliminary interrogation. I told him no, that if Carl was apprehended I'd arrange for a telephone interrogation. I thanked him for Kansas City's cooperation, and hung up.

If the Kansas City police picked Carl up, and if my telephone interrogation indicated he was our boy, I would, of course, arrange to go to Kansas City. I hoped it wouldn't be necessary, but it would be the only thing I could do — unless we came up with enough new information to justify an outright accusation of murder and the steps required to bring him to New York. We were a long way from that point now, and not getting any closer.

Walt Logan returned at eight-twenty. "Come on, Benny," he said. "I'll drive you home."

Benny Thomas laughed softly. "No, thank you. I'll take a cab."

"All clear, Walt?" I asked.

"All the way. And listen, Benny — I put it to your family the best way I could. It didn't upset them at all, Benny. They said they'd known there would be times like this. They said they knew your record would bring the police around, if you were ever even *near* trouble, because of your rap-sheet. But they're for you, Benny. A hundred per cent."

"Thank you," Benny said. He nodded a good-by to both of us and walked quickly from the squad room.

"There goes our hottest suspect," Walt said. "And I don't mind telling you I'm just as glad. He's got a damned nice family."

"You check with the cab driver?"

"Sure. I guess Benny must have wanted to laugh at us a little, just to get even. He didn't say so, but the cab driver's a retired cop. He's the same one that put the arm on Benny a couple of times, years ago. Seems like he and Benny got to be friends, after Benny got out the last time and the cop retired and started driving a cab. Anyhow, he drove Benny home all right. He even went up and joined the party. He stayed there until a little after four o'clock, so that means he was with Benny from a quarter of ten till —"

"Wait a minute!" I said.

It had hit me. It should have hit me before, of course. It should have hit me the instant Benny Thomas said it the first time.

I ran to the window and leaned out. Benny Thomas was just stepping out onto the sidewalk.

"Hold it, Benny!" I called. "I'll be right down."

He looked up at me, frowning a little for the first time since he'd been brought in. "All right," he said.

I grabbed up the knife and started for the door. "Come with me, Walt. I want to ask Benny a couple of questions."

We went down the steps to the street two at a time.

"What's up?" Benny asked. He had his smile back now.

I handed him the knife. "Take a look at this, Benny. You ever see it before?"

He studied it carefully. "No . . . No, I can't say I have." He returned the knife to me and I dropped it into my pocket.

"All right," I said. "Now about that switchboard, Benny. You were the only operator, I understand. You worked a double shift, from eight in the morning until midnight. Right?"

"Yes, that's right."

"Did the owners ever have an operator on duty between midnight and eight in the morning?"

"No. The board has always been cut out of the lines at midnight."

"That's what I thought. And when you cut the board out of the lines, the private phones in the apartment house begin to operate just like private phones anywhere else?"

"Yes. Why?"

"I just want to get the picture clear in my mind. I was pretty sure it was one of the boards you can cut out, but I wanted to check."

"That particular kind of switchboard was something of an experiment, I think. I understand the telephone company never installed very many of them. But they're very good for a house where most of the tenants are away all day. When the board's cut into the lines, it provides people with an answering and message service, you know. There wasn't much point in providing that kind of service after midnight, though."

"Do all the phones in the building work that way, Benny?"

"Oh, no. I'd say about a fourth of the tenants have just the regular house phone — the one that goes with every apartment. Those work through the switchboard too, of course, but when the board is cut out at midnight, those phones go dead."

"Did the owners send anyone out to take over that board, after you walked off it last night?"

"No, they didn't. I went past there just a while ago, to pick up my pay, and they read me off about it. They were furious. They said they didn't know anything about it until today. You'd think I'd *stolen* the board, the way they carried on."

"What kind of phone does Gus Brokaw have in his apartment?"

"A house phone."

"And if the switchboard wasn't in operation, Brokaw's phone wouldn't be of any use to him, would it?"

"No, I'm afraid it wouldn't."

"That just about takes care of it.

Well, thanks for the information, Benny. We'll see if we can help you land another job."

"I'd appreciate it. A word from the police would go a long way."

Walt and I said good night to him, and then Walt turned to me and said, "Give."

"Gus Brokaw seems to have got his story twisted a bit."

"How so?"

"He told me he called a woman on his phone at exactly eleven o'clock. But Brokaw has a house phone, and Benny Thomas cut off the switchboard and walked out on his job at a quarter of ten. Brokaw's phone would have gone dead. He *couldn't* have called that woman from his apartment. Not if he called after a quarter of ten."

"Maybe he meant to say he called from some other phone, Steve."

"No. He made a production of it. Told me how he and this woman had a code cooked up, so he could call her right from his apartment without his wife knowing what he was up to."

"You check it out?"

"No, I didn't. You were gone, and I didn't want to leave the apartment. I had somebody else check it out for us."

"Looks like we'd better recheck."

"And fast," I said.

## 11.

The room was small and hot and smelled of sweat. The woman who had opened the door to Walt and me stared at us belligerently. She was about forty, a big-boned woman with heavy, almost masculine features and hair so black there were blue highlights in it.

I showed her my badge. "You talked to Detective Meers earlier today," I said. "What, exactly, did you tell him?"

"About Gus Brokaw being here, you mean?"

"That's right."

"I told him the truth. Gus called me up and wanted to come over. He got here a little after eleven o'clock."

"For what purpose?"

"To play cards. He likes to play poker, and so do my husband and I. We played all night."

"You know we don't believe that."

"So you don't believe it. So who cares?"

"You think impeding a homicide investigation is something to take lightly, Mrs. Chase? Have you any idea at all of how much time you and your husband will do, as accessories after the fact?"

"I don't know what you're talking about. I'm not even interested."

"Where's your husband?"

"Away."

"Where?"

"How would I know? He just went for a walk, that's all."

"Mind if we look around?"

"Naturally I mind. You got a warrant?"

"We can get one fast enough."

"Suppose you get it, then."

There was a man's voice from the next room. "Edna," he said. "Come here a minute." It was a thin, wheedling voice, scarcely strong enough to carry to us.

I turned and walked to the room and stepped inside.

He was sitting on a straight chair beside a rumpled bed, a frail-looking, sunken-faced man in his early fifties. Despite the heat, he wore heavy trousers and a sweat shirt.

"Are you Mr. Chase?" I asked.

He stared at me a long moment. "Yes."

"I'm a policeman, Mr. Chase."

"I know. I heard you talking to Edna."

"You know why we're here?"

"I know."

"We'll get to the truth eventually, Mr. Chase."

Behind me, Mrs. Chase said, "You got no right coming in here like this. Get out!"

Mr. Chase looked at her, shaking his head slowly. "It's no use, Edna. I told you right from the start that —"

"Bill, shut your mouth!"

"This isn't the time to brass it out, Edna," he said. "That time's come and gone. All we got now is trouble, and we're heading straight for more, unless we —"

"Shut up, you crazy fool!"

"I'm sick. I can't stand any more of this."

"He's got a fever," Mrs. Chase said, jerking her head around toward me. "He's sick, and he doesn't know what he's saying."

"He seems to know well enough," I said. "Why not let him finish?"

"Gus was drunk when he came here," Mr. Chase said. "He didn't say anything about a killing. He just said he was in a little trouble, and that he wanted us to tell the police he'd been here since eleven o'clock, or a little after. He gave us two hundred dollars, and told us we should say he didn't leave here until late this morning. We didn't know anything about that girl getting murdered. I swear it."

"Bill . . ." Mrs. Chase began, and then stopped.

"He got over here about two o'clock in the morning. He said he'd give us some more money as soon as he could get it out of the bank." He paused to glance at Mrs. Chase. "If we'd known the score, we'd have kicked him out the door. But we didn't know. We figured it was an easy touch, so we put him to bed out there on the couch. When that other detective came around, he never did say anything about a murder. Edna and I talked it up big, not knowing what we were getting into."

"But now you know," I said.

"Yeah. When it's too damned late, we hear about it on the radio. Then Edna goes out and gets a paper."

"We did it because Bill's sick," Mrs. Chase said suddenly. All her

toughness was gone now. She looked almost as ill as her husband. "We would never have done anything like that if —"

"You'd better get one thing straight," I said. "Both of you. If you cooperate with us, we'll let the D.A. know about it. We can't make any deals with you, but there's a chance the D.A. will appreciate your cooperation.

Mr. and Mrs. Chase looked at each other a long time without saying anything. Then Mrs. Chase began to cry. It struck me as odd, that a woman like that should cry.

12.

Two hours later, Walt and I knocked on the door of Gus Brokaw's basement apartment.

He opened the door almost immediately and stood back to let us in. The skin that sagged away from his eyes and jowls looked even more pale than it had before, and his eyes were more bloodshot.

"Come in, boys," he said. "Any luck yet?"

"A little," I said. "Maybe you'd better get your coat, Mr. Brokaw."

"We going back to the morgue again?"

"We're taking you over to the station house."

"What for?"

"We want you to talk to a couple of people."

"Yeah? Who's that?"

"Mr. and Mrs. Chase."

I watched Brokaw's eyes crawl toward the open door, hesitate, then move back to me. "What for?"

Walt stepped behind him and touched his arm. "Let's go, Mr. Brokaw."

13.

At the station house, we took Brokaw into an interrogation room, motioned him to a folding chair, and sat down across from him.

"We know you bribed the Chases to alibi you, Gus," I said. "They've signed statements."

He stared at a spot midway between Walt and me, and said nothing.

"We found your knife. A few minutes ago we showed it to a couple of people you really *do* play cards with sometimes. They've identified it as yours. There was blood on your knife, Gus. It was the same type as Barbara Lawson's. How'd you feel when you found out that Benny Thomas had cut off the switchboard more than an hour before you said you called your woman friend?"

He stared straight ahead.

"We just heard from the lab, Gus. They're working on that bath mat. They'll be able to prove that some of the fibers from your clothes were left on the mat when you carried Barbara up to the roof. And the other way around, too. Some of the fibers from the mat will be rubbed into your clothing."

"That Benny Thomas," Gus said, almost as if to himself. "That damned Benny."

"Why did you kill her, Gus?" I asked.

He grasped one hand with the other and began cracking the knuckles.

"Why?" I said.

He took a deep breath, then let it out very slowly.

"I just went crazy, I guess," he said.

"You want to tell us about it?"

"Well, it was the whiskey that done it. If I hadn't been drunk I'd of kept my head. I saw her in the elevator about nine o'clock. She was going out somewhere. She said the bathroom faucets needed fixing, and I said I'd take care of it while she was out. Then I got busy with something else, and I didn't get up to her apartment until about midnight. I figured she'd still be out, but she was there. Anyhow, I went to work on the faucet.

"She come in to watch, and with her standing there, looking so pretty and smelling so good, I got so I couldn't think of nothing else. I hadn't been able to get her out of my mind for more than a minute at a time for two or three months. I didn't much care what happened to me for doing it — all I knew was that I had to grab her and kiss her." He paused a moment. "Then I done a crazy thing. She was all dressed up, and I didn't want to get her clothes dirty, so I washed off my hands. And then I turn around and reach out for her. You never seen such a change in anybody. All at once she wasn't sweet and nice, like she always was before. She jumped back from me and started cussing me.

"I don't know what happened. I just couldn't think. I couldn't even see good, I was so mad. I started to grab her again, and damned if she didn't spit right in my face. She did it twice, and then she turned around to run off from me — and that's when I hit her with the knife. I swear I didn't even know I had the knife out."

"Why did you take her up on the roof, Gus?" Walt asked.

"I figured she might be expecting somebody. Maybe a guy with a key she'd given him. She was all dressed up, and all — and I guess I just got panicky. I'd remembered this chimney, see, and I thought I could put her in it. By the time anybody found her, I'd have an alibi."

"But you'd forgotten how tall those chimneys really were — isn't that what happened, Gus?" I asked.

"Yeah. I just wasn't thinking none too clear. I climbed up on the base and got the mat in, but I couldn't lift the girl up high enough."

"Is that all, Gus?" I asked. "We'd like to get this down on paper."

"I'll tell Kansas City they can stop looking for that guy Carl," Walt Logan said.

Brokaw began cracking his knuckles again. "That damned Benny," he said softly. "You never could depend on him for a minute."

Win $50.00!

*Here's your chance to be a detective! All the clues you need to follow Detective-Sergeant Paul Regan's reasoning and come up with a killer are in the story. In 200 words or less, finish the story. Find the killer and the clues which point to him in the story. The best ending to this story, in the opinion of the editors of MANHUNT, which reaches us before March 1, 1955, will win for its author a $50 prize. The name of the winner and his entry will be published in our August 1955 issue. Duplicate awards will be made in case of ties. It is not necessary to purchase this magazine in order to enter the contest.*

# YOU, detective

## No. 3 — The Sweet Death

**BY WILSON HARMAN**

DETECTIVE-SERGEANT Paul Regan held the wrinkled, brown sheet of paper in his hand and stared at it for a second. Then he returned his gaze to the tall, dark man who was standing at the far end of the large room. "You wanted to see me about something, Rawlins?" he asked quietly.

"I want to tell you that I consider this whole business an outrage," Rawlins said. "Neither Paula Kincaid nor I have the time to spend five hours traveling to this God-forsaken hamlet just because some fool of a policeman gets the idea . . ."

"That either you or Miss Kincaid here murdered George Temple," Regan said. "Temple left each of you, as his only remaining friends, fifty thousand dollars. Either of you might have that bequest as a motive for murder. Either of you could have sent George Temple the poisoned chocolates. At any rate, I don't notice Miss Kincaid complaining."

"That's right, Rawlins," Paula Kincaid said. She was a small, fair woman with an angular look about her. She wore dark glasses and her voice was low-pitched. "There isn't

any purpose to complaining. We're here and we might as well make the most of it. Think of me. I'd barely gotten home when Sergeant Regan here called me and I had to come back."

"Yes, I wanted to ask you about that, Miss Kincaid," Regan said. "You were here yesterday afternoon, weren't you?"

"I arrived about two o'clock," Paula Kincaid said. "George's maid will testify to that. I stayed a few hours and then left. George was in perfect health when I last saw him."

"What does it matter who came to see him?" Rawlins asked. "The package was mailed. The poisoned candy inside killed him."

"That's right, Mr. Rawlins." Regan looked down at the brown paper again. "This is the wrapping-paper the candy was delivered in. The address is written in block letters — either of you could have done that. The package was postmarked yesterday morning at eleven, in New York. Both of you live in Manhattan. The package has one set of fingerprints on it — only one. But they're too smudged to be of any use. One of you two made those fingerprints. One of you two mailed the package that killed George Temple. We've got testimony from New York that says the package was left at the main post office, but the man there just postmarked it and shot it right out without noticing who'd delivered it."

"It's ridiculous," Rawlins said. "Neither Paula nor I would kill for money."

"Other people have done it," Regan reminded him. "Both of you needed money, didn't you? Miss Kincaid?"

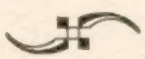
"Yes, I did," she admitted briefly. "I've been living from hand to mouth — I could have used fifty thousand dollars."

"So could I," Rawlins said; "but I certainly wouldn't kill for it."

"One of you did kill for it," Regan said.

He looked down at the brown paper in his hand. "And I know which one," he added.

Whom did Regan arrest? And why?



# MUGGED AND PRINTED

JAMES T. FARRELL returns to *Manhunt* this month with another of his fine and realistic stories, *Rendezvous*. Farrell, of course, is the author of the Studs Lonigan novels and other famous works, including his latest novel, *The Face Of Time*, which has received rave reviews from readers and critics alike. A new collection of Farrell's shorter work will be published next Spring and, in the meantime, you can read *Rendezvous* and future Farrell stories we'll be bringing you in this magazine.

HAL ELLSON'S latest short story, *The Pigeons*, which appears in this issue, is another in the long line of illustrious works by the famous author of *Duke*, *Tomboy*, *The Golden Spike* and *Summer Street*. Ellson's work almost always deals with juvenile delinquency, and his novels are required reading in some college courses on that subject. A great deal of Ellson's material comes from personal knowledge, since he's done a lot of work with delinquents in rehabilitation centers and elsewhere.

FRANK KANE'S newest Johnny Liddell novelette, *Return Engagement*, which appears in this issue, is one of the most unusual stories Kane's ever written. Kane's real-life action, description and characters have drawn cheers from critics as well as readers ever since the publication of his first Johnny Liddell novel, *About Face*. Since then there have been many novels about Liddell, including *Green Light For Death*, *Slay Ride*, *Bullet Proof* and the newest, *Grave Danger*, and the tough and hard-boiled private eye has become a *Manhunt* favorite. We'll be bringing you more of Kane's fine stories soon.

JONATHAN CRAIG starts a new series this month with the publication of his complete new novel, *Classification: Homicide*. His previous documentary stories for *Manhunt* have proven so popular that the new "Police File" series was the only possible result. Craig gets his material through research in actual police files, as well as through his wide and growing knowledge of police work in all its branches. A former night-club musician, Craig's held a number of different jobs and has a wide background of experience which serves to make his stories real and exciting.

EVAN HUNTER'S *Hot* is the latest story from the author of *The Blackboard Jungle*. We think it's one of the best yarns he's done so far. ◆ HAROLD Q. MASUR returns to *Manhunt* this month with a new story featuring lawyer-detective Scott Jordan: *Dead Issue*. Masur's a lawyer himself, but we'll bet he never had such a dangerous case! ◆ SAM MERWIN, JR. makes his debut this month with *The Revolving Door*. Author of *The Creeping Shadow*, *Killer To Come* and other books, Merwin is a well-known figure in the detective field. ◆ RICHARD DEMING is familiar to *Manhunt* readers as the creator of Manville Moon, the one-legged private eye featured in many of Deming's books and stories. In this issue he's come up with the newest idea we've ever seen, in the Moon-less *The Competitors*.

—Continued from back cover

# Yes! YOU GET $15.00 WORTH OF MYSTERIES AT ONCE — FREE!

*Including 3 of the Latest Smash Hits of*

## ERLE STANLEY GARDNER

IMAGINE GETTING $15 worth of brand-new mysteries right away — FREE! Full-length hard-bound books by "champion" mystery authors. SIX great books in all — THREE of them by the "undisputed king of mystery writers," Erle Stanley Gardner! ANOTHER by the great Mary Roberts Rinehart! ANOTHER by that cracker-jack writer Mignon Eberhart! ANOTHER by that expert baffler, Stuart Palmer! You get *six new* books that would actually cost you a total of $15 if you bought them — but now they're yours FREE!

Why do we make such a liberal offer? Simply to introduce you to the many advantages of membership in the famous Detective Book Club—the only Club that brings you the very latest NEW mysteries *at one third the usual cost!*

### The Cream of the Best NEW Mysteries

Out of the 300 or more new detective books that come out every year, the Club selects the very "cream of the crop"—by top-notch authors like Erle Stanley Gardner, Agatha Christie, Stuart Palmer, Manning Coles, Mignon Eberhart, Anthony Gilbert, and Leslie Ford. ALL THESE, and many *other* famous authors have had their books selected by the Club. Many of them are members of the Club themselves!

Club selections are ALL newly published books. As a member, you get THREE of them *complete* in one handsome volume (a $6.00 to $7.50 value) for only $1.89.

### You Take ONLY The Books You Want

You do NOT have to take a volume every month. You receive a free copy of the Club's "Preview", which will fully describe all coming selections and you may reject any volume in advance. You need NOT take any specific number of books — only the ones you want. NO money in advance; NO membership fees. You may cancel membership any time you please.

### You Enjoy These Five Advantages

(1) You get the cream of the finest BRAND-NEW detective books — by the best authors. (2) You save TWO THIRDS the usual cost. (3) You take ONLY the books you want. (4) The volumes are fresh and clean — delivered right to your door. (5) They are so well printed and bound that they grow into a library you'll be proud to own.

### Mail Postcard for Six FREE Books

SEND NO MONEY. Simply mail postcard promptly, and we will send you at once — FREE — the six complete mystery thrillers, described here, together with the current triple-volume containing three other complete new detective books. But this exceptional offer may never be repeated. So don't risk disappointment. Clip the postcard now, and mail it to:

**DETECTIVE BOOK CLUB**
**Roslyn, L. I., N. Y.**

**MAIL THIS POSTCARD NOW FOR YOUR SIX FREE BOOKS**

•

**NO POSTAGE NEEDED**

**ALL SIX BOOKS FREE** — **SEND NO MONEY—JUST MAIL POSTCARD**

43

**Walter J. Black, President** PV
**DETECTIVE BOOK CLUB**
**Roslyn, L. I., New York**

Please enroll me as a member and send me FREE, in regular publisher's editions, the SIX new full-length mystery novels pictured on this page. In addition send me the current triple-volume, which contains three complete detective books.

I am not obligated to take any specific number of volumes. I am to receive an advance description of all forthcoming selections and I may reject any book before or after I receive it. I may cancel membership whenever I wish.

I need send no money now, but for each volume I decide to keep I will send you only $1.89 plus a few cents mailing charges as complete payment within one week after I receive it. (*Books shipped in U. S. A. only.*)

Mr. }
Mrs. } .....
Miss }
(PLEASE PRINT PLAINLY)

Address.....

Zone No.
City.....(if any).....State.....

# Free- All Six of these Thrill-Packed Mysteries!

TO NEW MEMBERS

*Including 3 of the Latest Smash Hits of*

## ERLE STANLEY GARDNER

ALL FULL LENGTH BOOKS RETAIL PRICE $15.00

## JUST MAIL COUPON TO GET THESE SIX GREAT NEW MYSTERIES FREE—AT ONCE!

**1 THE CASE OF THE RUNAWAY CORPSE**
*By Erle Stanley Gardner*

Myrna hires Perry Mason to get a letter saying she plans to poison her husband Ed. (Ed has just died of *poisoning!*) All Perry finds is—*blank* paper!

**2 THE CASE OF THE FUGITIVE NURSE**
*By Erle Stanley Gardner*

Perry Mason sneaks into an apartment; finds an *empty* safe. Not sinister . . . . EXCEPT that the TENANT had already been found MURDERED!

**3 THE CASE OF THE GREEN-EYED SISTER**
*By Erle Stanley Gardner*

Mason's client wants to get back damaging evidence against a Mr. Fritch. Then Fritch is killed. Mason and client *need* an alibi—but don't have one!

**4 MAN MISSING**
*By Mignon G. Eberhart*

Sarah noticed odd things at the hospital. And then—the too-still figure on Lieutenant Parly's bed. *A MAN DEAD FOR 3 YEARS!*

**5 THE FRIGHTENED WIFE**
*By Mary Roberts Rinehart*

Anne kept her earnings secret; afraid Fred would kill her. Then she lay dying of a bullet—with Fred beside her, *dead!* (One of 4 mysteries in book.)

**6 COLD POISON**
*By Stuart Palmer*

Four people get threats. 3 are *scared stiff*. The 4th is just STIFF! "Accident," says coroner. But Miss Withers says MURDER. Her only clue is *a missing finger!*

FIRST CLASS
PERMIT No. 47
(Sec. 34.9, P.L.&R.)
Roslyn, N.Y.

**BUSINESS REPLY CARD**
No Postage Stamp Necessary If Mailed in the United States

**4¢ POSTAGE WILL BE PAID BY**
**DETECTIVE BOOK CLUB**
**ROSLYN, L. I.**
**NEW YORK**

**DON'T MISS OUT ON THIS SENSATIONAL OFFER!**

•

**MAIL POSTCARD AT ONCE!**

*continued on inside cover*